# MAXIM GORKY

# FIVE PLAYS

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

# М. ГОРЬКИЙ

# ПЯТЬ ПЬЕС

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

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PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY MARGARET WETTLIN

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# THE PETTY-BOURGEOIS

## CHARACTERS

VASILY VASILYEVICH BESSEMENOV, *58 years old, a well-to-do house painter who is head of his guild*

AKULINA IVANOVNA BESSEMENOVA, *52 years old, his wife*

PYOTR BESSEMENOV, *26 years old, his son, a student expelled from the university*

TATYANA BESSEMENOVA, *28 years old, his daughter, a schoolmistress*

NIL, *27 years old, his foster-son, an engine-driver*

PERCHIKHIN, *50 years old, a distant relative, a bird-man*

POLYA, *21 years old, Perchikhin's daughter, a seamstress who works by the day for the Bessemenovs*

YELENA KRIVTSOVA, *24 years old, a jail warden's widow who has lodgings at the Bessemenovs'*

TETEREV, *a choir singer*<br>SHISHKIN, *a student* } *lodgers at the Bessemenovs'*

TSVETAYEVA, *25 years old, a schoolmistress and friend of Tatyana's*

STEPANIDA, *the cook*

AN OLD WOMAN

A YOUNG BOY, *a house painter's apprentice*

A DOCTOR

*The action takes place in a small provincial town.*

## SETTING

*A room in the house of a prosperous working man. The right corner upstage is partitioned off; this narrows the back of the stage and forms a small room downstage right which is separated from the large one by a wooden archway hung with chintz curtains. A door in the back wall of the large room leads into the entrance hall and the other half of the house, where the lodgers' rooms and the kitchen are. To the left of this door stands a huge sideboard, and in the corner—a trunk. An old-fashioned clock hangs on the wall to the right of the door. Its pendulum, big as a moon, swings slowly in its glass case, and when all is quiet it can be heard to repeat in a cold, detached way: going-gone! going-gone! There are two doors in the left wall, one leading into the room of Bessemenov and his wife, the other into the room of their son Pyotr. Between these doors is a large white-tiled stove. An old sofa upholstered in oilcloth stands in front of the stove, and a big table at which the family dines and has tea stands in the middle of the room. Cheap straight-backed chairs are placed at painfully exact intervals around the walls. A china-closet downstage left contains fancy boxes, Easter eggs, a pair of bronze candlesticks, tea and soup spoons, a few wineglasses and silver goblets. A piano and an étagere with sheet music on it stand against the wall facing the audience in the small room separated by the archway. One corner of this room is taken up by a philodendron in a tub. In the right wall are two windows with potted plants on the sills. A couch is placed under the windows, and beside the couch, downstage, there is a little table.*

## ACT I

*About five o'clock in the afternoon. An autumn twilight glances in at the windows. It is almost dark in the big room. Tatyana, half-reclining on the couch, is reading a book. Polya is sitting at the table sewing.*

TATYANA (*reading*): "The moon came up. And it was hard to believe that such a sad little moon could throw so much tender, silvery-blue light upon the world." (*Drops the book into her lap.*) It's too dark to read.

POLYA: Shall I light the lamp?

TATYANA: Don't bother. I'm tired of reading.

POLYA: How nicely he writes! So simply and . . . touchingly! Makes you want to cry. (*Pause.*) I'm dying to know how it ends. Do you suppose they'll get married?

TATYANA (*vexed*): What difference does it make?

POLYA: I could never love a man like him.

TATYANA: Why not?

POLYA: He's too tiresome. Always complaining. And sort of—shilly-shally. A man ought to know what he wants.

TATYANA (*softly*): Does Nil?

POLYA: He certainly does.

TATYANA: What does he want?

POLYA: I can't explain—not in the simple way he does. But I know one thing: he'll make it unpleasant for wicked, greedy people. He hates them.

TATYANA: Who is bad and who is good?

POLYA: He can tell you. (*Tatyana says nothing, and does not look at Polya, who, with a smile, takes the book out of her lap.*) It's awfully well written. She's so attractive—so simple and straightforward, and without any airs. When you read about a woman like that, it makes you seem better yourself.

TATYANA: You're very naive and amusing, Polya. Stories of this sort simply annoy me. There never was a girl like that. Or a house, or a river, or a moon, either. It's all made up. Books never paint life as it really is—my life and yours, for instance.

POLYA: They write about what's interesting. As if there was anything interesting about the way we live!

TATYANA (*irritably, ignoring what she says*): I often get the impression that the people who write books hate me and want to pick a quarrel with me. They seem to say: "This is better than you think, and that's worse."

POLYA: It seems to me all writers must be good, kind men. What wouldn't I give to set eyes on a writer!

TATYANA (*musingly*): They never describe the nasty, irksome things as I see them. They do something to them—enlarge them—make them seem tragic. And as for the good things—they just make them up. Nobody ever makes love the way the books describe it. And life isn't tragic at all. It just flows on quietly and monotonously, like a big murky river. Your eyes get tired from watching it, and your mind gets so dull that you don't even bother to ask yourself what makes it flow.

POLYA (*lost in reverie*): I *would* love to see a writer. All the while you were reading, I kept thinking to myself: what's he like? young? old? dark?

TATYANA: Who?

POLYA: The author.

TATYANA: He's dead.

POLYA: What a pity! Has he been dead long? Was he young when he died?

TATYANA: Middle-aged. He drank.

POLYA: Poor thing. (*Pause.*) What makes clever people drink? Take that lodger of yours, the choir singer—he's clever and he drinks. I wonder why?

TATYANA: Because he's sick and tired of everything.

PYOTR (*coming out of his room looking the worse for sleep*): It's dark as the grave in here. Who's sitting over there?

POLYA: Me. And Tatyana Vasilyevna.

PYOTR: Why don't you light the lamp?

POLYA: We're enjoying the twilight.

PYOTR: The smell of icon oil seeps into my room from the old man's room. Maybe that's why I dreamt I was swimming down a gummy sort of river. It was hard going, and I lost my bearings—couldn't make out the shore-line. Bits of things kept floating past, but the minute I caught on to them they crumbled because they were rotten. A crazy dream. (*Walks back and forth whistling.*) Time for tea, isn't it?

POLYA (*lighting the lamp*): I'll bring it in. (*Goes out.*)

PYOTR: Somehow this house of ours gets particularly dull and dreary in the evening. All these antediluvian things seem to swell up and get bigger and heavier and fill up space until there's no air left to breathe. (*Hammers on the sideboard with his fist.*) Take this hippopotamus—it's been standing in one and the same place for eighteen years. Eighteen years! They say life goes rocketing ahead, but this sideboard hasn't budged an inch since the day it was put here. I kept banging my head against it when I was a little chap and I still keep banging into it morally, so to speak. An idiotic piece of furniture. More of a symbol than a sideboard.

TATYANA: How tiresome you are, Pyotr! You ought not to live the way you do.

PYOTR: What way?

TATYANA: Never going anywhere. Except upstairs to see Yelena. You go there every evening, and that's a great worry to mother and father. (*Pyotr doesn't answer, just keeps walking up and down and whistling.*) You can't imagine how tired I get these days! The noise and disorder at school wear me out. Here at home it's quiet and orderly, although it's noisier since Yelena moved in. I tire so easily. And the winter holiday is still a long way off. November ... December.... (*The clock strikes six.*)

BESSEMENOV (*putting his head through the door of his room*): Chattering away, chattering away, and I don't suppose you've written that petition yet.

PYOTR: I have so.

BESSEMENOV: You certainly took your time about it! Tck, tck, tck. (*Disappears.*)

TATYANA: What petition?

PYOTR: Suing merchant Sizov for seventeen rubles fifty kopeks—the cost of painting the roof of his shed.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*enters with another lamp*): Raining again. (*Goes to the sideboard, takes out the tea things and lays the table.*) It's chilly in here. The stove's been lighted, but it's chilly just the same. The house is old and full of cracks. Oh, Lordy, Lordy! Your father's pettish again, children. Says his back aches. He's getting old. And everything's going wrong—so many cares and expenses!

TATYANA (*to her brother*): Were you at Yelena's last night?

PYOTR: Ye-es.

TATYANA: Was it lively?

PYOTR: The usual thing. We drank tea, sang songs, got into an argument...

TATYANA: Who against whom?

PYOTR: Nil and Shishkin against me.

TATYANA: Naturally.

PYOTR: Nil grew ecstatic, as usual. He gets on my nerves. Prophet of courage and love of life! Absurd. To hear him talk you'd think this uncertain life of ours was a sort of Uncle Sam who at any minute would shower blessings on us. Shishkin expounded on the beneficial effects of milk and the harmful effects of tobacco. And he accused me of having a bourgeois outlook.

TATYANA: The same old thing.

PYOTR: Quite.

TATYANA: Do you like Yelena very much?

PYOTR: Not a bad sort—cheery and attractive.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: A giddy creature, if you ask me. She does nothing but fritter her time away. Company every blessed evening—sipping and munching, singing and dancing. She'd do better to go out and buy herself a wash-stand—washes in a basin and splashes the water all over the floor. The boards'll rot.

TATYANA: I went to a social at the club last night. Somov was there—you know him, member of the Town Council and patron of our school. He barely nodded to me—barely nodded, mind you, but when Judge Romanov's mistress came into the room he rushed over to her and bowed and kissed her hand as if she were the governor's wife!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Think of that, now! Instead of taking the arm of an honest girl and walking proudly down the hall with her for everybody to see!

TATYANA (*to her brother*): It's the limit! In the eyes of such people a schoolmistress deserves less respect than a loose, painted woman!

PYOTR: Forget it. It's beneath you. As for that woman, she may be loose, but she doesn't paint.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: How do you know? Have you licked her cheek? A fine thing! Your sister's insulted and you stand up for the woman who's the cause of it!

PYOTR: Please, mother!

TATYANA: It's impossible to talk in front of mother. (*Heavy steps are heard in the hall.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Tut-tut! None of your lip! Instead of marching up and down like that, Pyotr, you might carry in the samovar. Stepanida's been complaining it's too heavy for her.

STEPANIDA (*brings in the samovar, puts it on the floor beside the table, straightens up, and says to her mistress in a gasping voice*): Like it or lump it, I'm telling you once again I've not got the strength to carry such a weight. My pins won't hold up under it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: I suppose you'd like us to hire somebody special to carry in the samovar?

STEPANIDA: That's your business. Let the choir singer carry it in—won't do him no harm. Pyotr Vasilyevich, be so kind as to lift it up on the table. I just can't.

PYOTR: Here. Umph!

STEPANIDA: Thanks. (*Goes out.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA: That's an idea, Pyotr; you speak to the choir singer. Let him carry in the samovar. It really—

TATYANA (*sighing*): Oh, for goodness' sake, mother!

PYOTR: Perhaps I ought to ask him to fetch the water, scrub the floors, clean the chimney, and wash the clothes while he's at it?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*with a disparaging wave of her hand*): Now why should you run on like that? All those things get done in good time and without his help. But as for the samovar—

PYOTR: Every evening you raise the vital question of who is to bring in the samovar. Nothing will be done about it until you hire a man-of-all-work, mark my word!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: What do we need a man for? Your father looks after the house and yard himself.

PYOTR: That's what I call being stingy. And it's not pretty to be stingy when you've got all that money in the bank.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Shh! Hold your tongue! If your father hears you, he'll give you a taste of money in the bank! Was it *you* put it in?

PYOTR: Listen, mother—

TATYANA (*jumping up*): Oh, Pyotr, must you? I can't stand it another minute!

PYOTR (*going up to her*): Sorry. A fellow gets drawn into these squabbles before he knows it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: A fine thing to say! As if it was a crime to talk to your mother!

PYOTR: The same thing, day after day! It damps a person's spirits. Makes him feel as if he was lined with soot. Or rust.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*calling*): Father! Come and have tea!

PYOTR: When my time's up I'll go back to the university and never come home for more than a week at a time, as I used to. Three years in Moscow made me forget what life at home was like, with all its fuss over nothing. It's wonderful to live alone, not to be under your parents' roof.

TATYANA: Unfortunately, I have nowhere to go.

PYOTR: I told you to go away and study.

TATYANA: Why should I? I don't want to study—I want to live. To live! Can't you understand?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*burning her hand as she takes the teapot off the samovar*): Ouch! Devil take it!

TATYANA (*to her brother*): I don't know what it means to really live. I can't even imagine what it's like. How does one go about living?

PYOTR (*pensively*): It's not easy, and you've got to be cautious.

BESSEMENOV (*comes out of his room, inspects his son and daughter, sits down at the table*): Have you called the lodgers?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Call them, Pyotr.

(*Pyotr goes out, Tatyana walks over to the table.*)

BESSEMENOV: Humph! Lump sugar again. How many times have I told you—?

TATYANA: Oh, what difference does it make, father?

BESSEMENOV: I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to your mother. Nothing makes any difference to you, I know that.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: We only bought a pound, father. There's a whole head of sugar untouched—we didn't have time to break it up. Don't be angry.

BESSEMENOV: I'm not angry, I'm just saying lump sugar is too heavy and not sweet enough, which means there's no saving in it. You must always buy head sugar and break it into pieces yourself. Crumbs will be left, and the crumbs can be used in cooking. The sugar itself is light and very sweet. (*To his daughter.*) What are you sighing and pulling a face about?

TATYANA: Nothing.

BESSEMENOV: Nothing? Then there's no reason to sigh. Or perhaps it's painful for you to listen to what your father has to say? It's not for my own sake I talk, but for the sake of you young folk. I've lived my life; yours is still ahead of you, and when I look at you I can't help wondering how you're ever going to get on in this world. What's your aim? You don't like our way of living, I can see that plain enough, but what new way have you thought of? That's the question.

TATYANA: Father! Do you know how many times you've said the same thing?

BESSEMENOV: And I'll say it again, and I'll keep on saying it over and over until I'm in my grave. Because I have no peace—all on your account. A great mistake I made when I gave you an education. Here's Pyotr expelled from the university, and you—an old maid.

TATYANA: I have a job, I—

BESSEMENOV: So I've heard, but what's the good of it? Nobody needs those twenty-five rubles you earn—not even you. Get married and settle down like a respectable girl ought to, and I'll give you *fifty* rubles a month.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*throughout the old man's talk she has been fidgeting nervously, now and then attempting to put in a word; at last she says gently*): Would you like some cheese-cake, father? There's some left over from dinner.

BESSEMENOV (*turns to her, glares at her a moment, then gives a wily smile*): Very well. Bring in your cheese-cake, we'll have some. (*Akulina Ivanovna hastens to the sideboard and Bessemenov turns to his daughter.*) See how your mother holds me off? Like a goose keeping the dogs off her goslings. Trembles all over for fear something I say may hurt your feelings. Ah, the bird-man! Turned up again after all this time!

PERCHIKHIN (*appears in the doorway with Polya standing silently behind him*): Peace be unto the grey-haired master of this house, his handsome wife and his respected offspring, now and forevermore.

BESSEMENOV: So you've been drinking again?

PERCHIKHIN: Drowning my troubles.

BESSEMENOV: What troubles?

PERCHIKHIN (*bows to everyone as he talks*): Sold a goldfinch today that sang with a yodel. Had it for three years, and went and sold it. That was a low-down thing to do, and so I took comfort in my cups. Too bad about that birdie. Got used to it. Loved it.

(*Polya smiles and nods to her father.*)

BESSEMENOV: Then what did you sell it for?

PERCHIKHIN (*holds on to the backs of the chairs as he makes his way round the table*): Got a good price for it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: What's money to you? You just throw it away.

PERCHIKHIN (*sitting down*): True. Can't hold on to money. True enough.

BESSEMENOV: And so there was no reason to sell it after all.

PERCHIKHIN: Yes, there was. The birdie was going blind. It would have died soon.

BESSEMENOV (*chuckling*): So you aren't quite the fool you look.

PERCHIKHIN: You think it was cleverness made me do it? Oh, no—it was the vileness of my nature.

(*Enter Pyotr and Teterev.*)

TATYANA: Where's Nil?

PYOTR: He and Shishkin have gone to a rehearsal.

BESSEMENOV: Where's the play to be given?

PYOTR: In the riding hall. To the soldiers.

PERCHIKHIN (*to Teterev*): My respects to God's piper. Shall we go and catch titmice, you and me?

TETEREV: Let's. When?

PERCHIKHIN: Tomorrow if you like.

TETEREV: Not tomorrow. I've got to sing at a funeral.

PERCHIKHIN: Then let's go before mass.

TETEREV: That suits me better. Call for me. Akulina Ivanovna, was there anything left over from dinner? Some porridge, or something?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: There was. Polya, go fetch it.

(*Polya goes out.*)

TETEREV: Thank you for that. Today, as you are aware, a funeral and a wedding deprived me of my dinner.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: I know.

*(Pyotr takes up a glass of tea and goes through the archway into the little room, followed by the piercing eye of his father and the hostile eye of Teterev. For a few seconds all eat and drink in silence.)*

BESSEMENOV: You must be making a lot of money this month, Terenty Khrisanfovich. Not a day passes but somebody dies.

TETEREV: Not bad. A streak of good luck, you might say.

BESSEMENOV: And lots of weddings.

TETEREV: True, they're marrying hard this month.

BESSEMENOV: Save up your money and get married yourself.

TETEREV: No, thank you.

*(Tatyana joins her brother and they begin talking in undertones.)*

PERCHIKHIN: That's right, don't get married. Marriage is not for queer ducks like us. Let's go and catch bullfinches.

TETEREV: Let's.

PERCHIKHIN: A glorious thing, that bullfinch-catching! Down comes the first snow, decking out the earth like a priest at Eastertide. Everything pure and shining and still as still. If it's sunny in the bargain—ah! then your heart fairly leaps up with joy! The autumn leaves still glinting with gold, the boughs silver with snow, and suddenly in the midst of all that loveliness—whir! whir!—out of the clear sky comes a flock of bright red birds that perch like poppies on the branches—chirp! chirp! chirp! Sweet little birdies, fat little birdies, strutting about like brigadier-generals, peeping and chirping—the prettiest sight you ever saw! Makes you want to be a birdie yourself for the joy of playing in the snow with them, it does indeed.

BESSEMENOV: The bullfinch is a foolish bird.

PERCHIKHIN: I'm foolish myself.

TETEREV: A pretty picture you painted.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*to Perchikhin*): You've got the mind of a two-year-old.

PERCHIKHIN: I do love to catch birds. Could anything be prettier than a song-bird?

BESSEMENOV: It's a sin to catch birds, don't you know that?

PERCHIKHIN: I do, but I can't help it. It's the only thing I love to do or know how to do, and any job is made better by loving it, seems to me.

BESSEMENOV: Any job?

PERCHIKHIN: Any at all.

BESSEMENOV: And what if you love slipping other people's things into your own pocket?

PERCHIKHIN: That's not a job; that's thieving.

BESSEMENOV: Hm. Maybe.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*yawning*): Oh-ho-ho! Very tiresome. Funny how long and tiresome the evenings are. You might cheer us up by bringing your guitar and singing something, Terenty Khrisanfovich.

TETEREV (*placidly*): On agreeing to become your lodger, respected Akulina Ivanovna, I did not take upon myself the obligation of supplying you with entertainment.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*not catching it*): What's that?

TETEREV: That's that.

BESSEMENOV (*surprised and exasperated*): I can't understand you, Terenty Khrisanfovich. You're not worth your salt, if you'll excuse my saying it, but you put on the airs of a fine gentleman. Where do you get them?

TETEREV (*placidly*): I was born with them.

BESSEMENOV: Just what are you so proud of, if you don't mind telling me?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: He's just showing off. What's there for a man like him to be proud of?

TATYANA: Mother!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*with a start*): Eh? What's that?

(*Tatyana shakes her head reproachfully.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Have I said something I oughtn't to again? Ah me! Very well, I'll keep my mouth shut if I must!

BESSEMENOV (*offended*): Watch what you say, mother. There's educated people here. They'll criticize anything and anybody, what with all the learning they've got. You and me are just old and foolish.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*placatingly*): That's all right. They really do know a lot.

PERCHIKHIN: It's true what you said, brother. You said it in fun, but it's true just the same.

BESSEMENOV: I said nothing in fun.

PERCHIKHIN: But old folk really are foolish.

BESSEMENOV: Especially you.

PERCHIKHIN: I don't count. If you ask me, there wouldn't be no foolishness if there weren't no old folk. An old man thinks the way a damp tree burns—more smoke than fire.

TETEREV (*smiling*): Right you are!

(*Polya gazes affectionately at her father and strokes his shoulder.*)

BESSEMENOV (*sullenly*): Humph. Well, go on with your fabrications.

(*Pyotr and Tatyana stop talking and watch Perchikhin with a smile on their lips.*)

PERCHIKHIN (*vivaciously*): Old folk are stubborn—that's the main thing. An old man knows he's wrong, and that he don't understand nothing, but he won't admit

it. He's too proud. "Is it possible," thinks he, "to have lived all these years and worn out forty pairs of breeches, and still not know nothing? Oh, no!" It's too hurtful to admit a thing like that, so he goes on pounding his fist and shouting: "I'm old! I'm right!" But it don't do no good. His mind's gone groggy. As for the young—their minds are light and quick.

BESSEMENOV (*rudely*): A liar if there ever was one! But look, if we're so foolish, oughtn't we to be taught sense?

PERCHIKHIN: Oh, no! What's the good of flattening bullets against a rock?

BESSEMENOV: Wait, don't interrupt—I'm older than you. Here's what I say: why is it the ones with light, quick minds run away from us, the old folk, and hide in corners and make faces at us and don't even want to talk to us? Think that over. And I'll think it over, too—all by myself, beings as I'm too foolish for this company. (*Pushes back his chair with a loud noise, goes to his room and says from the doorway*): Too foolish for my educated offspring.

(*Pause.*)

PERCHIKHIN (*to Pyotr and Tatyana*): What did you have to go and hurt your father's feelings for?

POLYA (*smiling*): It's you who did that, father.

PERCHIKHIN: Me? I never hurt a flea!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Oh, Lordy, Lordy! What's the matter with us? Why did you offend the old man? You're all so puffed up and peevish. And he's old. All he needs is peace and quiet, and to be paid respect. After all, he's your father. I'll go and speak to him. You wash up the tea-things, Polya.

TATYANA (*going over to the table*): Why should father be angry with us?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*from the door*): Because it's so thoughtful of you to avoid him all the time, clever girl!

(*As Polya washes the dishes Teterev puts his elbows on the table and gazes at her heavy-eyed. Perchikhin goes over to Pyotr and sits down at the little table. Tatyana goes slowly to her own room.*)

POLYA (*to Teterev*): What makes you look at me like . . . like that?

TETEREV: Nothing in particular.

PERCHIKHIN: What you thinking about, Pyotr?

PYOTR: How to get away from here.

PERCHIKHIN: There's something I've been wanting to ask you for a long time. What's "sewerage"?

PYOTR: What do you care? I can't be bothered explaining—it would take too long to make you understand.

PERCHIKHIN: Do *you* understand?

PYOTR: Of course.

PERCHIKHIN (*glancing suspiciously into his face*): Hm.

POLYA: I wonder what's keeping Nil Vasilyevich so long.

TETEREV: What remarkable eyes you've got!

POLYA: You told me that yesterday.

TETEREV: And I'll tell you tomorrow.

POLYA: Why?

TETEREV: I don't know. Perhaps you think I'm in love with you?

POLYA: Heavens, no! I don't think anything.

TETEREV: Don't you? Too bad. Try thinking.

POLYA: About what?

TETEREV: Oh, anything—why I keep forcing myself upon you, for instance. Think it over and tell me your answer.

POLYA: You're very odd.

TETEREV: I know. You've told me that before. And so I'll tell you once again: go away from here. You mustn't stay in this house. Go away.

PYOTR: Is this a love scene? Had I better withdraw?

TETEREV: Don't bother. I class you among the inanimate objects.

PYOTR: Rather flat.

POLYA: (*to Teterev*): How scrappy you are!

(*Teterev walks away and begins to listen attentively to what Pyotr and Perchikhin are saying. Tatyana comes out of her room with a shawl wrapped round her and sits down at the piano.*)

TATYANA (*as she leafs through the music*): Hasn't Nil come yet?

POLYA: No.

PERCHIKHIN: Not very cheery in this house.... Here's another thing I wanted to ask you, Pyotr: not long ago I read in the paper like as if the English had built a flying boat. Looks like any other boat, but if you get in it and press a certain button—zing!—up it goes like a bird to the very clouds and carries people goodness knows where. They say lots of Englishmen have disappeared this way. Is it true, Pyotr?

PYOTR: Nonsense.

PERCHIKHIN: But it was in the paper.

PYOTR: Lots of nonsense gets in the paper.

PERCHIKHIN: Does it, now?

(*Tatyana plays something soft and sad.*)

PYOTR (*tetchily*): Yes, it does.

PERCHIKHIN: Don't be angry. I don't see why all you young folk should be so uppity with us back numbers. You don't even want to talk to us. That's not nice, is it?

PYOTR: What next?

PERCHIKHIN: Why, the next thing is: it's time for me to be going, beings as you're sick of me. Are you going home soon, Polya?

POLYA: As soon as I tidy up. (*Leaves the room; Teterev follows her with his eyes.*)

PERCHIKHIN: Have you forgot, Pyotr, how you and me used to catch titmice together? You had a soft spot in your heart for me those days.

PYOTR: Even now I—

PERCHIKHIN: Oh, it's clear how you feel now.

PYOTR: I was fond of gingerbread and lollipops in those days, but they make me sick now.

PERCHIKHIN: I see. Eh, Terenty, shall we go and have a mug of beer?

TETEREV: I'm not in the mood.

PERCHIKHIN: Then I'll go alone. Nobody's grumpy in the pub. Nobody puts on airs in the pub. A man could die of the blues with you folk, and it's not to your credit to say so. You don't do nothing, don't want nothing. What if we have a game of cards? There's just four of us. (*Teterev looks at Perchikhin and smiles.*) Don't feel like it? Just as you say. So it's good-bye. (*Walking up to Teterev he goes through the motions of tossing down a drink.*) Come along?

TETEREV: No.

(*Perchikhin gives a hopeless wave of his hand and goes out. Silence. The notes of the piece Tatyana is picking out on the piano sound very distinctly. Pyotr, who is lying on the couch, listens and whistles the tune. Teterev gets up and paces the floor. Out in the hall a pail or a samovar-pipe falls with a crash, and Stepanida is heard to say*: "Who let *you* in here?")

TATYANA (*going on with her playing*): I wonder why Nil doesn't come?

PYOTR: Nobody comes.

TATYANA: Are you waiting for Yelena?

PYOTR: For anybody.

TETEREV: No one will come and see you.

TATYANA: You're always so morbid.

TETEREV: No one will come, for you have nothing to offer anyone.

PYOTR: Thus spake Terenty-the-Oracle.

TETEREV (*insistently*): Has it ever occurred to you that that "back number," the tipsy bird-man, is alive, body and soul, whereas you two, who are just on the threshold of life, are already half-dead?

PYOTR: And you? What might be your appraisal of yourself?

TATYANA (*getting up off the piano stool*): Oh, stop it! The same thing over and over! You've had this out before, you know.

PYOTR: I like your style, Terenty Khrisanfovich. And I like the role you play—the role of our judge. But why have you chosen it? You always sound as if you were administering extreme unction to us.

TETEREV: Extreme unction is not administered by such as me.

PYOTR: That's not the point. What I wanted to say was that you dislike us.

TETEREV: Very much.

PYOTR: Commendable candour. Thanks.

(*Enter Polya.*)

TETEREV: You're welcome.

POLYA: To what?

TATYANA: Insults.

TETEREV: The truth.

POLYA: I want to go to the theatre. Won't someone come with me?

TETEREV: I will.

PYOTR: What's on tonight?

POLYA: *Second Youth.* Won't you come, too, Tatyana Vasilyevna?

TATYANA: No, I'm not going to the theatre this winter. I'm sick of it. I can't stand those melodramas, with all their shooting and shouting and sobbing. (*Teterev strikes a key of the piano with one finger, calling forth a sad clear note.*) It's all so false. Life twists people into knots without any noise and shouting. Without any tears. Imperceptibly.

PYOTR (*morosely*): They dramatize the tortures of love, but nobody gives a damn for the drama of a man torn between duty and desire.

(*Teterev, smiling, goes on striking bass notes.*)

POLYA (*smiling self-consciously*): I'm just mad on the theatre. Take don César de Bazan, the Spanish grandee—he's simply wonderful! That's my idea of a hero.

TEREV: Am I like him?

POLYA: Heavens! Not the least little bit!

TEREV (*chuckling*): What a pity!

TATYANA: It makes me sick to hear actors make love on the stage. It's never like that in real life. Simply never!

POLYA: Well, I'm going. Are you coming, Terenty Khrisanfovich?

TEREV (*stops striking the keys*): Not now—after being told I don't resemble a Spanish grandee.

(*Polya goes out laughing.*)

PYOTR (*watching her go*): What's a grandee to her?

TEREV: She finds something wholesome in a grandee.

TATYANA: She likes his fine clothes.

TEREV: And his cheerfulness. Good people are always cheerful; rascals rarely are.

PYOTR: According to your theory, you must be the greatest rascal on earth.

TEREV (*again bringing forth soft rich notes from the piano*): I'm just a drunk. Do you know why there are

so many drunks in this Russia of ours? Drinking makes life easier. We Russians love a drunk. We hate innovators and people who are daring, but we love a drunk. That's because it's easier to love something petty and worthless than something great and good.

PYOTR (*pacing the floor*): "This Russia of ours"! How strange it sounds! Is Russia really ours? Is it mine? Is it yours? Who are "we"? What are "we"?

TETEREV (*singing*): "Free-winged birds are we. . . ."*

TATYANA: For heaven's sake, stop pounding on the piano, Terenty Khrisanfovich! It sounds like the tolling of a funeral bell!

TETEREV (*continuing*): I'm playing an accompaniment to my mood.

(*Tatyana flounces out into the hall.*)

PYOTR (*reflectively*): Do stop it, it really does get on one's nerves. . . . It seems to me that when a Frenchman or an Englishman says "France" or "England," the word means something real, something concrete and comprehensible. But when I say "Russia," it means nothing at all to me. I'm quite incapable of giving it any clear meaning. (*Pause. Teterev goes on sounding notes.*) There are lots of words we use by force of habit, without taking stock of their meaning—"life," for instance. "My life." What meaning is hidden in those two words? (*He paces the floor in silence. Teterev softly strikes the keys, filling the room with moaning sound, while he watches Pyotr with a smile frozen on his face.*) What the dickens ever made me get mixed up in that student movement? I went to the university to study, and that's what I was doing. . . . For God's sake, stop your hammering! . . . I was quite unaware that any "regime" was keeping me from studying Roman law—quite unaware of it, to be perfectly

* A line from Pushkin's poem, "The Prisoner."—*Tr.*

frank. But I was aware of the pressure of my comrades, and I yielded to it. And so two years of my life have been struck out. That's what I call violence—violence done to me; can you deny it? I dreamed of completing my studies, becoming a lawyer, getting a job, reading, studying life—in a word, of living!

TETEREV (*prompting him ironically*): To the delight of your parents, and the benefit of church and state, as befits a humble servant of society.

PYOTR: Society? That's the one thing I loathe! It keeps raising the demands made on the individual without giving him an opportunity to develop normally and unimpeded. Society, in the person of my comrades, shouted at me: "A man must be, above all other things, a citizen!" Well, I tried being a citizen, damn them! I have no desire and am under no obligation to submit to the demands of society! I'm an individual, and an individual must be free. I say, stop that damned pounding!

TETEREV: I'm accompanying you, most respected bourgeois who made the mistake of being an honest citizen for—how long?—half an hour? (*Noise out in the hall.*)

PYOTR (*irritably*): Don't go too far!

(*With a mocking glance at Pyotr, Teterev goes on striking the keys. Enter Nil, Yelena, Shishkin, Tsvetayeva, and, a bit behind them, Tatyana.*)

YELENA: What's the meaning of the funeral bell? Good evening, Monster. Good evening, Lawyer—or rather, would-be Lawyer. What are you doing here?

PYOTR (*sullenly*): Talking nonsense.

TETEREV: And I am tolling the knell of him who has taken leave of life before his time.

NIL (*to Teterev*): Will you do something for me? (*Whispers something in his ear. Teterev nods.*)

TSVETAYEVA: It was a marvellous rehearsal, simply marvellous!

YELENA: You should have seen how fiercely Lieutenant Bykov flirted with me tonight, Mr. Lawyer!

SHISHKIN: Bykov's an ass.

PYOTR: What makes you think I care who flirts with you?

YELENA: Oh dear, I didn't know you were so out of sorts

TSVETAYEVA: Pyotr Vasilyevich is always out of sorts.

SHISHKIN: He's that sort.

YELENA: And are you, too, in your usual mood, Tanya? Gloomy as an autumn night?

TATYANA: Yes, I am.

YELENA: And I'm feeling ever so gay. Why is it I'm always so gay?

NIL: I can't answer that. I'm always gay myself.

TSVETAYEVA: So am I.

SHISHKIN: I'm not *always,* but—

TATYANA:—all the time.

YELENA: Was that an attempt at being funny, Tanya? Good for you! Tell me this, Monster, why am I always so gay?

TETEREV: Oh, thou embodiment of Frivolity!

YELENA: What's that? Very well, I'll remember those words the next time you make love to me!

NIL: I wouldn't mind having something to eat. I've got to go to work in a little while.

TSVETAYEVA: And work all night long? Poor dear!

NIL: All night and all day. Twenty-four hours. I think I'll go into the kitchen and pay my respects to Stepanida.

TATYANA: I'll tell her to feed you. (*Goes out with Nil.*)

TETEREV (*to Yelena*): Look here, young lady, am I too supposed to fall in love with you?

YELENA: Yes, you are, you brazen man! Yes, you are, you grouchy monster. You are, you are, you are!

TETEREV (*backing away from her*): Then I will. It won't be hard. I was once in love with two young girls and a married woman at the same time.

YELENA (*creeping up on him threateningly*): And what came of it?

TETEREV: Nothing. All in vain, alas!

YELENA (*under her breath, nodding in the direction of Pyotr*): What went on between you two? (*Teterev laughs. They talk quietly together.*)

SHISHKIN (*to Pyotr*): Could you let me have a ruble for three or four days? My boots have burst open.

PYOTR: Here. You owe me seven already.

SHISHKIN: I haven't forgotten.

TSVETAYEVA: Pyotr Vasilyevich! Why don't you take part in our plays?

PYOTR: I can't act.

SHISHKIN: Do you think we can?

TSVETAYEVA: You could at least come to the rehearsals. The soldiers are just darlings. There's one called Shirkov—he's just too funny for words. So sweet and innocent, with such a shy smile. And so adorably stupid.

PYOTR (*watching Yelena out of the corner of his eye*): How you can find anything interesting in a person who's stupid, is more than I can see!

SHISHKIN: Shirkov's not the only one—

PYOTR: I don't doubt the whole company's just as bad.

TSVETAYEVA: How can you say such a thing? What makes you so nasty? Is that what you call being aristocratic?

TETEREV (*suddenly speaking in a loud voice*): I'm incapable of pitying others.

YELENA: Sh!

PYOTR: As you know, I'm a member of the middle-class.

SHISHKIN: Which makes it all the harder to understand your attitude towards the common people.

TETEREV: Nobody ever pitied me.

YELENA (*under her breath*): But you ought to return good for evil.

TETEREV: I have nothing to return.

YELENA: Not so loud.

PYOTR (*listening to what Yelena and Teterev are saying*): Why should you pretend to feel sympathy for the common people?

TSVETAYEVA: We don't pretend. We share with them whatever we have.

SHISHKIN: It's not even that. We just find pleasure in being with them. They're unaffected. And there's something wholesome about them, like the air in the woods. Bookworms like us need to fill our lungs with fresh air every once in a while.

PYOTR (*insistently, with suppressed annoyance*): You like deceiving yourselves. You have unacknowledged motives for making up to these soldiers. It's absurd, if you don't mind my bluntness. To seek fresh air among soldiers is . . . er . . . begging your pardon. . . .

TSVETAYEVA: But not only among soldiers. We give performances at the railway depot, too.

PYOTR: It's all the same. What I'm saying is that you just deceive yourselves when you try to make some lofty "cause" out of all your fuss and bluster. You're convinced you are helping to develop the individual. Sheer self-deception. Tomorrow some officer or foreman will come along and give your "individual" a sock in the jaw that will knock everything out of his head that you've put into it—if you've really put anything into it.

TSVETAYEVA: It's very discouraging to hear you say such things.

SHISHKIN (*glumly*): And very disagreeable. It's not the first time I've heard you say them, and I like them less each time. One of these days you and I are going to have a good talk, Pyotr—once and for all!

PYOTR (*in a sarcastic drawl*): You alarm me. But I'm dying to have that talk.

YELENA (*vehemently*): What makes you like that? (*To the others*): Why should he want people to think him a beast?

PYOTR: Sheer affectation on my part.

TSVETAYEVA: It really is. You're just trying to be different. All men try to be different in front of women. Some of them make themselves out to be pessimists, others Mephistopheles. But really they're just a lot of lazybones.

TETEREV: Short and sweet. Very well put.

TSVETAYEVA: Perhaps you're fishing for compliments? You'll have a long wait. I know you too well.

TETEREV: Which is more than I can say about myself. By the way, if you know so much, maybe you know this: ought one to return good for evil? In other words, do you consider good and evil to be coins of equal value?

TSVETAYEVA: Always twisting things into paradoxes!

SHISHKIN: Wait, don't interrupt. That's an interesting question. I for one am always ready to listen to Teterev. Give him time and he's sure to drive a nail of truth into your head. Most of us think very ordinary thoughts—as flat and worn as old coins.

PYOTR: You're too generous. You credit others with your own virtues.

SHISHKIN: Come, come, why shouldn't we face the truth? We ought to be honest even in little things. As for me, I frankly confess I've never expressed a single original idea, and oh! how I long to!

TETEREV: You've just done it.

SHISHKIN (*briskly*): What's that? Do you mean it?

TETEREV: I do. You've just expressed one, but I'll let you guess what it was.

SHISHKIN: It slipped out by chance.

TETEREV: One can't be original on purpose. I've tried it.

YELENA: Let's hear what you have to say about good and evil, you Inquisitor, you.

SHISHKIN: Let off some philosophical steam.

TETEREV (*striking a pose*): Worthy bipeds! You are greatly mistaken when you say you must return good for evil. Evil is a quality you are born with, and therefore it is of little value. Good is something you yourselves have acquired, and at so great a price that it has become rare and dear and lovelier by far than anything else on earth. Hence the conclusion that there is no point to, and no profit in, returning good for evil. Good must be returned only for good. Never must you give more than you receive, if you would not develop in others the instinct of the usurer. Man is a greedy creature. Once having received more than his due, he will demand more and more ever after. Nor must you give him less than his due, for if you once cheat him (man, mind, never forgets an injury!), he will proclaim that you are bankrupt. He will lose all respect for you and the next time, instead of paying you the good you have earned, he will offer you alms. Be punctilious in returning good for good, brothers, for no one on earth is more piteable and obnoxious than he who gives alms to his neighbour. But when you receive evil, return it many times over. Be cruelly lavish in paying back the evil your neighbour does you. If, when you ask for a crust of bread, he gives you a stone, bring the cliff down on his head.

*(Teterev begins his speech in a light vein, but he grows more and more serious as he goes on, ending up in strong, fervent accents. When it is over he walks away with heavy steps. No one speaks, everyone feels uncomfortable, aware of the sincerity and gravity of what he has said.)*

YELENA (*softly*): People must have made you suffer horribly.

TETEREV (*grinning*): Yes, but I have the hope that in time *they* will be made to suffer by me. Or rather, *for* me.

NIL (*entering with a bowl and a slice of bread in his hands. As he speaks he keeps one eye on the bowl to see that he doesn't spill its contents. Tatyana follows him in*): Philosophy, philosophy! You have a bad habit of philosophizing over every trifle, Tanya—the rain, a cut finger, or a smoking stove. When I hear philosophy wasted on such flea-bites I can't help thinking that learning does some people a lot of harm.

TATYANA: You're very rude, Nil!

NIL (*sitting down at the table and beginning to eat*): Am I really? If you're bored, begin to do something. A person who works has no time to be bored. If you're unhappy living at home, go and live in the country and teach the kids there. Or go to Moscow and study.

YELENA: Good for you, Nil. And scold this wretch too (*indicating Teterev*).

NIL (*throwing him a sidelong glance*): Another specimen. A second Heraclitus.

TETEREV: A second Swift, if you don't mind.

NIL: Too good for you.

PYOTR: Much too good.

TETEREV: A pity. I'd love to be called a Swift.

TSVETAYEVA: You don't want much!

NIL (*without raising his eyes from his bowl*): Come, don't lose your temper. By the way, has ... er ... Polya been here? Or rather, where has she gone?

TATYANA: To the theatre. Why?

NIL: Nothing, I was just asking.

TATYANA: Do you want her for something?

NIL: No. That is, not at the moment, but in general, I ... er ... always want her. Oh, damn it all! What am I saying? (*Everyone but Tatyana smiles.*)

TATYANA (*insistently*): What do you want her for?

(*Nil goes on eating, ignoring her question.*)

YELENA (*quickly, to Tatyana*): What was he scolding you for? Do tell me.

TSVETAYEVA: Oh, yes! That ought to be interesting.

SHISHKIN: I like the way he scolds.

PYOTR: And I—the way he eats.

NIL: Whatever I do, I do well.

YELENA: Come, Tanya, tell us.

TATYANA: I don't want to.

TSVETAYEVA: She never wants to do anything.

TATYANA: How do you know? Maybe I want terribly to . . . to die.

TSVETAYEVA: Ugh! How horrid!

YELENA: Brrr! I can't bear to hear people talk about death!

NIL: What can you say about death until you die?

TETEREV: That's true philosophy for you.

YELENA: Let's go up to my room. The samovar must be boiling by this time.

SHISHKIN: Just the thing—a glass of tea! And something to go with it, I hope?

YELENA: Of course.

SHISHKIN (*pointing to Nil*): The sight of him has filled me with envy, sinner that I am.

NIL: Nothing to envy any more—I've gobbled everything up. I'm coming too—I have an hour or so to spare.

TATYANA: Hadn't you better take a nap before going to work?

NIL: No, I hadn't.

YELENA: Pyotr Vasilyevich! Are you coming?

PYOTR: If you'll allow me to.

YELENA: With pleasure! Give me your arm!

TSVETAYEVA: Form pairs! Nil Vasilyevich, you come with me!

SHISHKIN (*to Tatyana*): And you with me.

TETEREV: They say there are more women than men in the world, but I've lived in many a town in this country,

and never, not once, has there been a woman left over for me.

YELENA (*laughing, makes for the door, singing as she goes*): Allons, enfants de la patri—i—i—i—e!

SHISHKIN (*giving Pyotr a push in the back*): Get a move on, enfant de la patrie.

*(They go out noisily, singing and laughing. For a few seconds the room is empty. Then the door of Bessemenov's room opens and Akulina Ivanovna comes out. Yawning, she puts out the lamps. From inside the room comes the voice of the old man droning his prayers. In the darkness the old woman stumbles over chairs as she makes her way back to her room.)*

CURTAIN

## ACT II

### THE SAME SETTING

*Noon of an autumn day. Bessemenov is sitting at the table. Tatyana is slowly and silently pacing the floor. Pyotr is standing in the archway between the two rooms gazing out of the window.*

BESSEMENOV: For a full hour I've been talking to you, my dear children, but my words don't seem to reach your hearts. One of you stands with his back to me, the other walks back and forth like a crow on a fence.

TATYANA: I'll sit down. (*Does so.*)

PYOTR (*turning to his father*): Come straight out with it: what is it you want of us?

BESSEMENOV: I want to know what you're like. As for you, Pyotr, I want to see what sort of man you are.

PYOTR: Wait a bit. You'll see in time. You'll see and understand, but first let me finish my studies.

BESSEMENOV: Hm, studies. Well, go ahead and study! But you don't. You waste your time bucking and balking. You've learned to turn your nose up at everything, but you haven't learned a sense of proportion. They threw you out of the university. Unjustly, you think? Not at all. A student is a student, and it's not up to him to say how things ought to be. If every young whippersnapper tried to lay down the law, everything would be

in a muddle and there would be no place in this world for sane and sensible people. First you've got to learn, and when you're an expert at your job it will be time enough to begin criticizing. Until then, anybody has a right to say "bah!" to your criticism. I tell you this not to find fault, but from the bottom of my heart, because you're my son, flesh of my flesh, and all that. I wouldn't say it to Nil, although goodness knows I've tried hard with him, even if he is my foster-son, but he's got different blood in him. He's not my sort, and the older he gets, the less like me he is. I can see he's cut out to be a scoundrel—an actor, or something just as bad. Maybe he'll even be a Socialist. Well, let him. Serves him right.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*peeping in at the door and speaking in a meek, plaintive voice*): Isn't it time for dinner, father?

BESSEMENOV (*sternly*): Get out of here! Don't poke your nose in where it don't belong. (*Akulina Ivanovna shuts the door. Tatyana glances reproachfully at her father, gets up, and begins to pace the floor again.*) See that? Your poor mother hasn't a minute's peace—always on her guard—scared to death I'll hurt your feelings. But you've hurt mine and hurt them deeply. I walk around my own house on tiptoe, as if there was broken glass on the floors. My old friends have stopped coming to see me. "Your children have got to be so educated," they say, "we're afraid they'll laugh at simple folk like us." And you have laughed at them more than once, making me blush with shame. All my friends have dropped me, as if educated children were the plague. You don't pay the least attention to your father, never say a kind word to him, never tell him what's on your mind, never confide your plans to him. I'm like a stranger to you. And yet I love you—yes, love you! Do you understand what that means—to love somebody? They threw you out of the university, and I suffer for it. For no good reason Tatyana is pining

away, an old maid, and I resent it. I don't even know what to say to people. Why is my Tatyana any worse than the girls who get married and all the rest? I want to see you a man, Pyotr—not a student. Look at the son of Philip Nazarov—he finished his studies, married a girl with a good dowry, gets a salary of two thousand a year, and is about to be elected a member of the Town Council.

PYOTR: I'll get married too, in time.

BESSEMENOV: Oh, I don't doubt that! You're ready to get married tomorrow, but who is it you want to marry? A widow. A flighty, loose woman!

PYOTR (*flaring up*): You have no right to call her that!

BESSEMENOV: Call her what? A widow? Or a loose woman?

TATYANA: Father! Please, oh please! Pyotr, leave the room or else keep quiet. *I* keep quiet, so why can't you? I don't understand anything. When you talk, father, it seems to me you're right. You are right, of course; I don't doubt it, but what is right for you is not right for us—for Pyotr and me. Can't you see that? We have our own way of looking— Wait, father, don't be angry. Both of us are right.

BESSEMENOV (*jumping up*): That's a lie! Only one of us is right. I'm right! How can you be right? Show me how! Prove it!

PYOTR: Don't shout, father. I say the same thing. You're right, but your way of seeing things is a way that's too tight for us. We've grown out of it, as we grew out of our clothes. It stifles us, holds us down. Your way of life won't do for us.

BESSEMENOV: It won't, won't it? Who do you think you are? Oh, yes—you've had an education, while I? I'm a fool. You're—

TATYANA: It's not that, father.

BESSEMENOV: Yes, it is. It's just that. Your friends come to see you—the house is so noisy a person can't even get his sleep at night. (*To Pyotr.*) You make eyes at that tart from upstairs in my very face. (*To Tatyana.*) You go about looking as if you'd lost your last friend. Me and your mother get squeezed into the corner—

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*bursting into the room and crying piteably*): Ah, my dears! As if I— Come, husband, do I ever complain? Me in the corner? I'd gladly stay in the corner, or out in the shed, if only you wouldn't quarrel! Don't snap at each other, dears! Don't, please don't!

BESSEMENOV (*holding her with one hand, pushing her away with the other*): Get out of here, old woman. They don't need you. They don't need either of us. They're too smart for us. We're not their sort.

TATYANA (*groaning*): How horrible! How simply ghastly!

PYOTR (*white with despair*): Can't you see, father, that this is stupid? Abominably stupid. All of a sudden, out of a clear sky—

BESSEMENOV: All of a sudden? Oh, no! Not all of a sudden. This has been coming to a head for years deep down inside of me.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Let him have his own way, Pyotr. Don't argue with him. Take pity on your father, Tatyana!

BESSEMENOV: Stupid? Oh no, you fool! Not stupid. Tragic! All of a sudden—father and children—both right! Beasts, that's what you are!

TATYANA: Pyotr, leave the room! Calm yourself, father—do, I beg of you.

BESSEMENOV: Heartless beasts! Squeezing us out. What are you so proud of? What have you ever done to be proud of? As for us, we've lived. And worked. Built this house—for you. Committed sins—for you. More sins than you'd think—all for you!

PYOTR (*shouting*): Did we ever ask you to?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Pyotr! For mercy's sake—!

TATYANA: Leave the room, Pyotr! I can't bear it! I'm going away. (*Sinks into a chair.*)

BESSEMENOV: Aha! Running away from the truth! Like the devil from incense. The voice of your conscience at last!

(*Nil throws the door wide open and stands in the doorway. He has just come from work. His face is dirty, streaked with dust and soot. His hands, too, are dirty. He is wearing muddy knee-boots and a short belted jacket shiny with dirt and grease. He holds out one hand as he speaks.*)

NIL: Give me twenty kopeks for the *izvozchik.* (*At his sudden appearance and the sound of his calm voice, everyone instantly stops shouting and stares at him in silence. Noticing the effect his entrance has made, he quickly guesses the reason.*)

NIL (*with a reproachful smile*): Another row?

BESSEMENOV (*shouting rudely*): You ignoramus! Where do you think you are?

NIL: Why, where am I?

BESSEMENOV: Your cap! Take off your cap!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: The very idea! Bursting into the dining-room in those filthy clothes! It's the limit!

NIL: Give me some money, quick!

PYOTR (*in a whisper as he gives him the money*): Come back as quickly as you can.

NIL (*with a smile*): Need my help? Hard going, eh? Be with you in a second.

BESSEMENOV: Another one who does things in fits and starts, and who's picked up crazy ideas. There's not a soul on earth he has respect for. That's Nil for you!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*copying his tone*): Not a soul. A rowdy, that's what he is! Run along, Tatyana, go . . . er . . . go and tell Stepanida we're ready for dinner.

(*Tatyana goes out.*)

BESSEMENOV (*with a wry smile*): And where will you send Pyotr? Tck, tck, tck, you foolish old woman! Can't you see it's not because I'm mad; it's because I'm worried—worried about *them.* It's not rage, but the pain in my soul, makes me shout like that. Why do you keep chasing them away?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: I know, husband. I see how things are, but I feel sorry for them. You and me are old. We are what we are, you and me. Oh, Lordy, Lordy! What're we good for any more? Who's got any need of us? But they've got their whole lives ahead of them. All the knocks they'll be taking, poor darlings!

PYOTR: I don't really see why you should upset yourself so, father. You've got this idea in your head—

BESSEMENOV: I'm afraid. Afraid of the times. Bad times. Everything's cracking up. Breaking down. Life's in an upheaval. I'm afraid for you. What if. . .? Who'd support us in our old age, then? You're the only arm we've got to lean on. Watch out for that Nil—you can see what he's like. And Teterev too. He's a bird of the same feather. Steer clear of them both. They hate us. Watch out.

PYOTR: Nonsense. Nothing will happen to me. I'll wait a little longer and then I'll write to the university and ask to be pardoned.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Do it soon, Pyotr, to set your father's mind at rest.

BESSEMENOV: I believe in you, Pyotr, when you talk like that—serious and sensible. I'm sure then that you'll live your life no worse than I've lived mine. But at other times—

PYOTR: Let's drop the subject. We've gone over it all again and again.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Bless your hearts! You're all I've got in the world!

BESSEMENOV: And then there's Tatyana. She'd ought to give up that teaching! What good does it do her? Just wears her out.

PYOTR: She really is in need of a rest.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: So she is, so she is.

NIL (*he has changed into a blue blouse, but has not washed yet*): Dinner ready?

(*On seeing Nil, Pyotr goes quickly out into the hall.*)

BESSEMENOV: You'd better wash that mug of yours before you ask for food.

NIL: My mug's not so big—I can wash it in a jiffy, but I'm hungry as a wolf. A cold rain and wind and a battered old engine—had a hell of a time last night. I'm worn to a frazzle. Wouldn't I like to put the boss on that engine and take him for a ride in weather like this!

BESSEMENOV: Blow off a little more steam. I've noticed you've been talking pretty free about your bosses of late. Look out, or something may happen.

NIL: Not to the bosses.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Father wasn't thinking about them, he was thinking about you.

NIL: Ah, about me.

BESSEMENOV: Yes, about you.

NIL: Uh-huh.

BESSEMENOV: None of your uh-huhs! You listen to me!

NIL: I'm listening.

BESSEMENOV: You've got a swelled head.

NIL: Have I had it long?

BESSEMENOV: And a sharp tongue.

NIL: Have I? (*Sticks out his tongue.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*shaking her head*): For shame, for shame! Think who you're sticking your tongue out at!

BESSEMENOV: Wait, mother; don't interrupt. (*Akulina Ivanovna goes out, still shaking her head.*) You're a very smart feller. I'd like to have a little talk with you.

NIL: After dinner?

BESSEMENOV: No, now.

NIL: Can't you wait till after dinner? I really am tired and hungry and chilled to the bone. Put it off if you don't mind. And then—what's there to talk about? You'll only pick a quarrel, and I don't like to quarrel with you. I'd rather have you ... well ... tell me straight to my face that you can't stand me, and that I'd—

BESSEMENOV: Go to the devil! (*Goes into his own room, slamming the door behind him.*)

NIL (*mumbling*): Good. I prefer the devil's company to yours. (*Walks about the room humming to himself. Enter Tatyana.*) Had another scrap?

TATYANA: You simply can't imagine—

NIL: Yes, I can. A dramatic scene from the endless comedy: "Neither Here Nor There."

TATYANA: It's easy for you to talk like that. You know how to keep off to one side.

NIL: I push all this fuss off to one side. And very soon I'll be out of it for good. I'm trying to transfer to a mechanic's job in the depot. I'm sick and tired of driving goods trains night after night. It'd be different if they were passenger trains—expresses—flying through the air, full steam ahead! But this way—crawling along like a snail with no one but your fireman? Dull as ditch-water. I like to be among people.

TATYANA: And yet you want to get away from us.

NIL: Forgive me, but anybody'd want to get away from you. I like noise, excitement, work, simple cheery people. Do you think you live? You just hang on the outskirts of life, and for some unknown reason keep groaning and

moaning. Who or what you're dissatisfied with is beyond me!

TATYANA: Is it really?

NIL: It really is. When a person finds himself lying in an uncomfortable position he turns over on the other side, but when he finds life uncomfortable he does nothing but complain. Why don't you make the effort to turn over?

TATYANA: A certain philosopher once said that only fools found life simple.

NIL: Philosophers seem to know a lot about what's foolish. I don't set myself up to be a sage. I simply find living here inexpressibly dull for some reason. It must be because of your endless complaints. Why complain? Who's going to help you? Nobody. There isn't anybody who could do it, and—it would hardly be worth his while if there was.

TATYANA: What makes you so hard, Nil?

NIL: Do you call that being hard?

TATYANA: Cruel. You've caught the infection from Teterev, who hates everybody for some reason.

NIL: Not everybody. (*Laughing.*) Did it ever strike you that Teterev looks like an axe?

TATYANA: An axe? What do you mean?

NIL: An ordinary steel axe with a wooden handle.

TATYANA: Stop joking, please do. It's a pleasure to talk to you, you have such original ideas, but you're so ... so indifferent.

NIL: To what?

TATYANA: To people. To me, for instance.

NIL: Hm ... not to everybody....

TATYANA: But to *me.*

NIL: To you? (*Both fall silent. Nil studies the toe of his boot. Tatyana gazes at him expectantly.*) You see, I ... you.... (*Tatyana strains towards him, but he doesn't notice it.*) I ... er ... like you, and ... respect you, but I don't see why you should be a schoolmistress. You don't like the work. It irritates you and wears you

out. And it's a great work, teaching. Children are the men and women of the future. You have to love and appreciate them. You have to love any job if you want to do it well. Take me—I love to work on an anvil. It thrills me to swing the hammer down on a sputtering formless red mass that spits fire at you, trying to put your eyes out and leap out of your hands. It breathes, it's alive, and you come swinging down on it, pounding it into anything you like.

TATYANA: One has to be strong to do that.

NIL: And skilful.

TATYANA: Don't you ever pity people, Nil?

NIL: Who, for instance?

YELENA (*entering*): You haven't had dinner yet, have you? Good. Come and have it with me. You should see the pie I've baked! Where's the lawyer? A simply heavenly pie!

NIL (*going over to Yelena*): Only too glad to. I'll gobble up your whole heavenly pie. I'm dying of hunger and they're not giving me anything to eat on purpose. They're mad at me for some reason or other.

YELENA: On account of your tongue, I guess. Come along, Tanya.

TATYANA: I must let mother know first. (*Goes out.*)

NIL: How did you know I stuck my tongue out at the old man?

YELENA: I didn't. Did you? Tell me all about it.

NIL: I'd much rather have you tell me about your heavenly pie.

YELENA: Don't worry, I'll find out. As for the pie—do you know who taught me to bake pies? A prisoner who was up for murder. My husband let him help in the kitchen. He was such a poor frail little chap—

NIL: Your husband?

YELENA: Good heavens, no! My husband was six foot five!

NIL: Such a little fellow?

YELENA: Very bright, you are. And he had whiskers this long. (*Holds up her fingers.*) Six inches on each side.

NIL: I've never heard of a man's virtues being measured in inches before.

YELENA: Alas! His whiskers were his only virtue.

NIL: Very sad. Go on about the pie.

YELENA: The prisoner was a cook, and he murdered his wife. But I was awfully fond of him. I don't think he really meant to kill her—

NIL: Of course not. Just an accident.

YELENA: Oh, get out of here! I don't want to talk to you! (*Tatyana appears in the doorway and watches them. Pyotr enters by another door.*) Hullo, Lawyer! Come upstairs and taste my pie!

PYOTR: With pleasure.

NIL: His papa scolded him today for not showing proper respect.

PYOTR: Oh, drop it!

NIL: I don't know how he dares call on you without first getting permission.

PYOTR (*glancing nervously at the door of his parents' room*): Let's go if we're going.

TATYANA: Go ahead. I'll come in a minute.

(*Nil, Pyotr, and Yelena go out.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*just as Tatyana is about to enter her own room*): Tatyana!

TATYANA (*stopping and lifting her shoulders impatiently*): Yes?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*in the doorway*): Come here. (*Almost in a whisper.*) Has Pyotr gone up to see that woman again?

TATYANA: Yes. And I'm going too.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Lordy, Lordy! She'll catch him in her snare, you see! I feel it in my bones. Speak to him,

Tanya. Tell him to keep away from her. Tell him she's no match for him—she hasn't got a kopek over three thousand and her husband's pension. I know it for sure.

TATYANA: Don't interfere, mother. Yelena doesn't show the least interest in Pyotr.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: She does that on purpose—on purpose, I tell you. To stir him up. She just pretends she isn't interested in him, but all the time she watches him like a cat a mouse.

TATYANA: What do I care? Speak to him yourself if you want to, but leave me alone. I'm tired, can't you see that?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: You don't have to talk to him this very minute. Lie down, dear, and have a rest.

TATYANA (*almost shouting*): Rest! I'm tired for the rest of my life—for the rest of my life, do you hear? Tired of you. Tired of everything.

*(Rushes into the hall. Akulina Ivanovna takes a step as if to stop her, then makes a helpless little gesture and stands still, looking dazed.)*

BESSEMENOV (*glancing through the door*): Another tiff?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: No. Nothing to speak of. She just—

BESSEMENOV: Just what? Did she answer you back?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*hastily*): Oh, no! What makes you think so? I just said it was time to have dinner, and she said she didn't want any dinner, and I said why not, and she said—

BESSEMENOV: You're not telling the truth, mother.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Yes, I am, really.

BESSEMENOV: All the lies you tell for their sakes! Look me in the eye. You can't, eh? Tck, tck, tck! (*Akulina Ivanovna stands silently before her husband with drooping head, and he stands silently stroking his beard. He sighs.*) We made a mistake when we gave them an education.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*softly*): It's not that, father. These days simple folk are no better than educated ones.

BESSEMENOV: It doesn't do to give children more than you've got yourself. The hardest thing of all is that they've got no backbone, no guts. A person ought to have something that makes him different from others. They don't. They've got no character. Take Nil—he's brazen, he's a scoundrel, but he's got character. He's dangerous, but you can understand him. (*Heaves a deep sigh.*) When I was a young man I loved church music and I loved to gather mushrooms in the forest. Is there anything Pyotr loves?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*with a meek sigh*): He's visiting the lady upstairs again.

BESSEMENOV: He is, is he? Just you wait, I'll show her! (*Enter Teterev, looking more dissolute and sullen than ever. He has a bottle of vodka in one hand and a glass in the other.*) At it again, Terenty Khrisanfovich?

TEREV: Last night, when vespers were over—

BESSEMENOV: What's the reason?

TEREV: No reason. Will dinner be ready soon?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: As soon as I lay the table. (*Begins laying it.*)

BESSEMENOV: It's a great pity, Terenty Khrisanfovich! A clever man like you ruining himself with drink!

TEREV: You're wrong, most honourable bourgeois. It's not drink that's ruining me; it's an excess of energy. Too much strength—that's my ruin!

BESSEMENOV: There's no such thing as too much strength.

TEREV: Wrong again. What's the good of strength these days? It's slyness that's wanted these days. Slipperiness. One has to be slippery as a snake. (*Turning back his sleeve, he exhibits his muscle.*) Look at this: one blow and the table's smashed to smithereens. But what good are such biceps these days? I can chop wood

with them, but I can't—let's say—write with them, and it would be foolish to try. What am I to do with so much strength? The only use I could make of it would be to show it off at the fair—lift weights, break iron chains—that sort of thing. But once I was a student, and a bright one at that—for which I was thrown out of the theological seminary. And now I don't want to be turned into a show-thing for people like you to stare at with quiet satisfaction. I want you to stare at me with unquiet dissatisfaction.

BESSEMENOV: You're a dangerous character.

TETEREV: Animals as big as me are never dangerous—you don't know your zoology. Nature is too clever. If, big as I am, I were to be vicious as well, how could you ever escape me?

BESSEMENOV: I wouldn't try to. Why should I? I'm in my own house, aren't I?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Don't talk to him, father.

TETEREV: Quite right! You're in your own house. The whole world is your own house. Of your own building. That's why there's no room in it for me, most honourable bourgeois!

BESSEMENOV: What's the sense in living as you do? No sense. But if you wanted to—

TETEREV: I don't want to. I hate everything too profoundly. I find it nobler to drink and go to the dogs than to live and work for the likes of you. Can you picture me sober, decently dressed, and talking to you in the obsequious language of a humble servant? You cannot. (*Polya comes into the room, but on catching sight of Teterev she backs away. He sees her, grins broadly, and holds out his hand.*) Hullo, don't be afraid. I won't say another word because I know everything.

POLYA (*embarrassed*): What? You couldn't know.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: So here you are! Go and tell Stepanida to bring in the soup.

BESSEMENOV: High time. (*To Teterev.*) I certainly do enjoy hearing you air your ideas, especially when they're about yourself. Just look at you—a fine sight, I must say! The minute you begin to spout I see all your weaknesses. (*He gives a soft, gloating chuckle.*)

TEREV: I like you. You're middling wise and middling stupid, middling good and middling bad, middling honest and middling false, middling brave and middling cowardly—in a word, a model bourgeois. The commonplace finds perfect expression in you, and that is a force which even heroes bow before—a force that lives on and on and is forever triumphant. So let's drink to the cabbage soup, O admirable mole!

BESSEMENOV: Wait till they bring it in. But why be so rude? You oughtn't to hurt people's feelings without cause. You ought to say what you think modestly, prettily, so that people will be glad to listen. Nobody wants to listen to insults. Nobody, that is, but a fool.

NIL (*entering*): Has Polya come?

TEREV (*with a little laugh*): She has.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: What do you care?

NIL (*to Teterev, ignoring her question*): At it again? You've been going it pretty strong of late.

TEREV: It's better to drink vodka than human blood, especially now that people's blood has got so thin and bad. There's very little good rich blood left. It's all been sucked up.

(*Enter Stepanida carrying the soup tureen and Polya with a platter of meat.*)

NIL (*going over to Polya*): Hullo. Is your answer ready?

POLYA (*under her breath*): Not here, in front of everybody.

NIL: Why not? What have we to be afraid of?

BESSEMENOV: Who are you talking about?

NIL: Me. And her.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: What's that?

BESSEMENOV: I don't get you.

TETEREV (*with a little laugh*): I do.

(*Pours himself out a glass of vodka and begins to drink.*)

BESSEMENOV: What's it all about? What did you say, Polya?

POLYA (*embarrassed*): Nothing.

NIL (*sitting down at the table*): It's a secret—deep and dark.

BESSEMENOV: If it's a secret, go off and whisper it in some corner, and not here in front of everybody. Smirking in our very faces! It's enough to drive a man out of his own house. All these secret signs and whispering and plotting, and me sitting there and gaping like a fool. Who do you think I am, Nil?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Really, Nil, it's just—

NIL (*calmly*): You are my foster-father. But there's no reason for getting excited and making a scene. Nothing in particular has happened—

POLYA (*getting up*): Nil . . . Vasilyevich . . . made me . . . told me last evening . . . asked me. . . .

BESSEMENOV: Well, out with it!

NIL (*calmly*): Don't try to frighten her. I asked her if she didn't want to marry me.

(*Bessemenov, his spoon stopped in mid air, stares incredulously at him and Polya. Akulina Ivanovna, too, is thunderstruck. Teterev gazes into space, slowly blinking his eyes. The hand on his knee jerks spasmodically. Polya stands with drooping head.*)

NIL (*continuing*): And she said she would give me her answer today. That's all.

TETEREV (*with a wave of his hand*): As simple as all that. Very plain and simple.

BESSEMENOV: So that's it. Hm. Simple indeed. (*Bitterly.*) And very modern. In the latest style. But then, what's it to me?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: I never heard of such a thing! It's a reckless lad you are. You might have spoken to us about it first.

NIL (*vexed*): Why in the world did I tell them!

BESSEMENOV: Leave him alone, mother. It's none of our business. Eat your dinner and say nothing. And I won't, either.

TETEREV (*getting tipsy*): But I will! Or perhaps I had better hold my tongue for the present.

BESSEMENOV: All of us had better hold our tongues. But I can't help saying it's a poor return for all I've done for you, Nil. You're always doing underhand things like this.

NIL: I've paid you in work for all you've done for me, and I'll keep on paying, but I have no intention of bowing to your will. You wanted to marry me to that simpleton of a Sedova because she has a dowry of ten thousand rubles. What do I want with her? It's Polya I love. I've loved her a long time and haven't tried to hide it. I've always lived open and above-board and always will, and you have nothing to reproach me with.

BESSEMENOV (*with restraint*): I see, I see. Splendid. Well, then, go ahead and get married. We won't stand in your way. But perhaps you wouldn't mind telling us on whose money you intend to live? Do tell us, if it's not a secret.

NIL: We'll work. I'm being transferred to the depot. And she—well, she'll find something to do. You'll keep on getting the thirty rubles a month I've been paying you.

BESSEMENOV: We'll see. Promises are easily made.

NIL: I'll give you a note of hand if you want it.

TETEREV: That's right, bourgeois, make him give you a note of hand.

BESSEMENOV: Who asked you to butt in?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: A fine person to offer advice!

TETEREV: Make him, by all means. But you won't—you've got too sickly a conscience. Give it to him yourself, Nil. Give him a note saying: I, the undersigned, agree to pay on the first of every month—

BESSEMENOV: I could make him. I have a right—I've fed him, clothed him, housed him from the age of ten. And now he's twenty-seven.

NIL: Wouldn't it be better to settle our accounts later?

BESSEMENOV: Just as you like. (*Flaring up.*) But remember one thing, Nil! From this day on, you and me are enemies! I'll never forget the insult of this—never, and you may as well know it!

NIL: What insult? How have I insulted you? You didn't think I was going to marry you, did you?

BESSEMENOV (*too excited to hear what he has said*): Remember! Thumbing your nose like this at him who has fed and clothed you! Acting in secret. Behind my back. Without so much as asking. (*To Polya.*) And you! Such a meek, quiet little thing! What are you hanging your head for? Nothing to say, eh? Do you know what I can do to you?

NIL (*getting up*): You can't do anything to her. Stop shouting. This is my house too if you want to know it. For ten years I've been working and handing over my pay to you. Not a little of my money has gone into all this. (*Stamps on the floor with his foot and indicates the walls with a wide sweep of his arm.*) It's the one who works who's the master.

*(While Nil is speaking Polya gets up and goes out. She meets Pyotr and Tatyana in the doorway. Pyotr glances into the room and disappears, but Tatyana stands there holding on to the jamb.)*

BESSEMENOV (*gazing wide-eyed at Nil*): What's that? You, the master!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Come away, father. Come away, do. (*Shaking her fist at Nil.*) Just you wait, Nil! (*Tearfully.*) You'll get what you're looking for!

NIL (*determinedly*): It's the one who works who's the master, and don't you forget it!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*trying to pull her husband after her*): Come along, old man, come along. Forget them. Don't speak, don't shout, they won't listen to you anyway.

BESSEMENOV (*yielding to his wife's efforts*): Try and be the master! We'll see who's the master! We'll see!

*(Bessemenov and his wife go into their room. Nil paces the floor excitedly. Somewhere far down the street a barrel-organ is playing.)*

NIL: Now I've done it! What the devil made me open my mouth, fool that I am! I just can't keep anything to myself—everything comes out in spite of me!

TETEREV: That's all right. A very interesting little scene. I got the greatest enjoyment out of watching and listening. Very interesting, very. Don't you worry, young fellow. You have a gift for being heroic. And at the present moment heroes are needed. They are, indeed. In our day all people ought to be divided into two classes: heroes—which is to say fools; and rascals—the clever ones.

NIL: Why did I have to let Polya in for such a disgusting scene? Frightened her, I guess. But she's not one to get frightened easily; more apt to get angry.

*(On hearing Polya's name, Tatyana, who is standing in the doorway, gives a start. The barrel-organ stops playing.)*

TETEREV: It's easy enough to divide people into fools and rascals. The world's full of rascals. Their minds work like the minds of animals. Strength is the only thing they recognize—not *my* kind of strength—not the strength that's in my chest and my good right arm, but the strength of cunning. The mind of a beast is all cunning.

NIL (*not listening to him*): We'll have to hasten the wedding day now. All the better. She hasn't given me her answer yet, but I know what it will be, bless her heart! How I hate that man! And this house! And the life here—rotten to the core! All the people who live here are freaks. And they don't seem to realize that they themselves are the ones who have made life what it is—turned it into a prison, a torture, a curse. How they have done it is more than I can say, but I hate them for it. I hate anyone who spoils life.

*(Tatyana checks herself as she is about to come forward. Soundlessly she goes over to the trunk in the corner and sinks down on it. All hunched over, she looks very small and more pathetic than ever.)*

TETEREV: It's the fools who make life worth living. There aren't many of them, and what they seek is not just for themselves. It's mostly for others. They're fond of thinking of schemes for achieving universal happiness and such nonsense. They try to find the beginning and the end of all things. In a word, they are very foolish.

NIL (*thoughtfully*): Foolish. I'm the one that's foolish. She's more sensible than I am. She, too, loves life, but hers is a calm, quiet sort of love. We'll get on famously,

she and I. We're daring, both of us, and once we set our hearts on a thing, we're sure to get it. She reminds me of a . . . a new-born babe. (*Laughs.*) We'll get on famously, she and I!

TETEREV: A fool will spend his whole life wondering what makes glass transparent, but a rascal just takes the glass and makes a bottle out of it.

(*The barrel-organ begins playing again, now very close, almost under the window.*)

NIL: Your mind runs to bottles.

TETEREV: No, to fools. A fool asks himself where the fire is before it's lit and where it goes when it's put out, but a rascal just sits down by the fire and warms himself.

NIL (*thoughtfully*): Warms himself. . . .

TETEREV: As a matter of fact, both of them are fools. But the foolishness of one is beautiful and heroic, while the foolishness of the other is loutish and beggarly. Their paths are different, but they both lead to the same place: the grave. Nothing but the grave, my friend. (*He laughs. Tatyana slowly shakes her head.*)

NIL (*to Teterev*): What's the matter with you?

TETEREV: I'm laughing. The fools who remain alive gaze upon their dead brother and ask themselves where he has gone. But the rascals just appropriate the property of the deceased and go on living their warm, comfortable, well-fed lives. (*Laughs.*)

NIL: Drunk as a lord. Hadn't you better go to your room?

TETEREV: My room? There's no room for me.

NIL: Enough of your philosophizing. Shall I help you there?

TETEREV: You can't help me, friend. I don't belong to either the accused or the accusing. I'm in a class of my own. I'm material evidence of the crime. Life has been

spoilt: it's a bad fit—too small for decent folk. Your petty bourgeois has cut it down and taken it in, and now it's too tight. And here am I, material evidence of the fact that a decent man has no room to stretch in; no reason and no excuse for living.

NIL: Come along, come along.

TETEREV: Hands off! Are you afraid I'll fall? I fell long ago, you fool! I was about to struggle back to my feet, but you came along and quite unintentionally knocked me down again. That's all right. Keep going, keep going. I'm not complaining. You're well and strong and have a right to go wherever you like, however you like. I, who am fallen, follow you with an approving glance. Keep going.

NIL: What are you raving about? It sounds interesting, but I can't make head or tail of it.

TETEREV: Don't try. It's better not to understand some things. Understanding them can't help matters. Keep going, keep going.

NIL: Very well, I'll go. (*Goes out into the hall without noticing Tatyana, who shrinks into the corner.*)

TETEREV (*bowing to him*): Best wishes, Thief. Without knowing it, you have stolen my last hope. Well, to hell with it! (*Goes over to the table where he has left his bottle, and in doing so notices Tatyana.*) And who might this be?

TATYANA (*softly*): Me.

(*The barrel-organ suddenly stops playing.*)

TETEREV: You? Hm. And I thought.... It seemed to me....

TATYANA: No, it's me.

TETEREV: I see. But ... why you? And why here?

TATYANA (*softly, but clearly and distinctly*): Because I have no reason and no excuse for living. (*Teterev walks towards her slowly and in silence.*) I don't know why I

should be so tired and miserable, but I am. Desperately miserable. I'm only twenty-eight years old. I'm ashamed, I really am—frightfully ashamed to feel like this—so weak and contemptible. I'm all empty inside, dried up, burnt out, and it's very painful. I never noticed how it happened—how this emptiness came to take possession of me. But why should I be telling you this?

TETEREV: I don't understand. Too drunk. Don't get you at all.

TATYANA: Nobody talks to me the way I want them to. The way I long to have them talk. I hoped *he* would. I waited for a long time—without saying anything. But then all this quarrelling, pettiness, triteness—the stuffiness of it all. It got me down. Little by little. And now I haven't the strength to go on. There's no strength even in my despair. I'm frightened. Now—all of a sudden—I'm frightened.

TETEREV (*shaking his head, goes away from her towards the door, and when he has opened it he turns and says thickly*): A curse upon this house! A curse, I say!

(*Tatyana gets up and goes slowly into her own room. For a moment the stage is silent and empty. Quickly and soundlessly Polya comes into the room followed by Nil. Without speaking they go over to the window, where Nil seizes her hand and speaks in a low voice.*)

NIL: Forgive me for what happened today. It was stupid and disgusting. I don't know how to keep my mouth shut.

POLYA (*almost in a whisper*): It doesn't matter. Nothing matters now. What do I care for them? It's all the same to me.

NIL: I know you love me. I can see you do. I won't even ask you. You're so funny. Last night you said: "I'll

tell you tomorrow, I've got to think it over." What's there to think over, silly? You love me, don't you?

POLYA: Yes, oh, yes! I have for ever so long. (*Tatyana steals to the door of her room and stands there listening.*)

NIL: We'll get on famously together, you'll see! You're such a good comrade—not afraid of being poor—always making the best of your troubles....

POLYA (*simply*): What's there to be afraid of with you? Even by myself I'm not meek. I'm just quiet.

NIL: And stubborn. You're strong, there's no bending you. Well, I'm happy. I knew this was how it would be, and I'm no end happy.

POLYA: I knew it too.

NIL: You did? You really did? It's grand to be alive, isn't it?

POLYA: It is, dearest. It is, my dearest love.

NIL: What's that? Say it again. How pretty it sounded!

POLYA: No compliments, if you please. But we must go. Someone may come.

NIL: Let them!

POLYA: No, no, we must go. Here, kiss me again.

(*He does, after which she escapes from his arms and runs past Tatyana without noticing her, but Nil, who follows with a smile on his lips, catches sight of her and stops, stunned and indignant. She stares at him in silence with lacklustre eyes and with a crooked little smile on her lips.*)

NIL (*contemptuously*): Eavesdropping! Peeping through the keyhole. Ugh! (*He goes out quickly. Tatyana remains standing as if turned to stone. Nil leaves the hall door ajar, and into the room comes the rough voice of Bessemenov, saying*: "Stepanida! Who spilled this coal? Are you blind? Sweep it up!")

CURTAIN

## ACT III

### THE SAME SETTING

*Morning. Akulina Ivanovna is washing the tea things, Stepanida is dusting the furniture.*

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Seeings as there's not much fat on today's meat, skim the grease off the gravy from yesterday's roast and put it in the soup. That'll give it the look of being good and fat, hear?

STEPANIDA: Uh-huh.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: And when you fry the veal, don't be too free with the butter. I bought five pounds on Wednesday, and yesterday there was scarce a pound left.

STEPANIDA: We've used it all up.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: You don't have to tell me that. You've used as much on that hair of yours as would fill a tinker's tin.

STEPANIDA: Nothing of the sort. I grease my hair with lamp oil—can't you tell by the smell?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Can't I just! (*Pause.*) Where did Tatyana send you this morning?

STEPANIDA: To the chemist's for some ammonia water. Buy me twenty kopeks' worth, she says.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Another one of her headaches, I s'pose. (*Sighs.*) She's always ailing.

STEPANIDA: Why don't you marry her off? She'd get well quick enough then.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: It's not so easy to marry your daughters off these days—specially, educated ones.

STEPANIDA: Give her a good dowry and somebody'll take her, education and all.

*(Pyotr's head is seen for an instant in the doorway of his room.)*

AKULINA IVANOVNA: I'll never live to see that happy day. Tatyana doesn't want to get married.

STEPANIDA (*scoffingly*): I'll bet she don't—at her age!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*sighs*): Who was at the lady's upstairs last night?

STEPANIDA: The teacher—the red-headed one.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: The one whose wife left him?

STEPANIDA: Him. And then that exciseman—you know, the skinny one with a yellow face.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Oh, yes. He's married to the niece of Pimenov, the merchant. He's got consumption.

STEPANIDA: You don't say! Well, he looks it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Was the choir singer there?

STEPANIDA: He was, and so was Pyotr Vasilyevich. The choir singer bawled till two o'clock in the morning. Roared like a bull.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: When did Pyotr come home?

STEPANIDA: It was getting light when I opened the door for him.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*shaking her head*): Dear me!

PYOTR (*entering*): Hurry up, Stepanida, finish what you're doing and get out.

STEPANIDA: The sooner I finish, the better I'll like it.

PYOTR: Then talk less and work more. (*Stepanida snorts and flounces out.*) Mother! How many times have I told you not to talk to her! Don't you realize it's bad taste—talking your private affairs over with the cook?

And asking her about... er ... all sorts of things. How can you stoop so low?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*offended*): And am I to ask you who I can talk to? If my own son don't want to talk to me, nor to his father either, I might be allowed to talk to the cook.

PYOTR: But don't you understand she's not your equal? You won't hear anything but gossip from her.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: And what do I hear from you? You've been home for six months now, and not an hour have you spent with your mother. Not a word have you told her about Moscow, or about—

PYOTR: But listen—

AKULINA IVANOVNA: And when you do talk, it's nothing but: "don't do this," and "don't do that." Teaching and scolding and making fun of your poor mother as if she was a schoolgirl! (*Pyotr gives a disgusted grunt and goes into the hall. Akulina Ivanovna calls after him.*) See that? A nice little chat we've had now, haven't we? (*She whimpers and wipes her eyes on the hem of her apron.*)

(*Perchikhin enters wearing an old quilted jacket tied at the waist with a piece of string, and with tufts of cotton-wool peeking out of the holes. He has bast sandals on his feet and a fur cap on his head.*)

PERCHIKHIN: What're you snivelling about? Did Pyotr say something he oughtn't? He whizzed past me like a martin. Didn't even say how-d'ye-do. Is my Polya here?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*with a sigh*): She's in the kitchen chopping up cabbage.

PERCHIKHIN: The birds have the right idea: soon's the little ones get their wings, off they fly without any

preaching from their parents. S'pose there might be a swallow of tea left over for me?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: And it's the ideas of the birds you follow, isn't it?

PERCHIKHIN: It is, and mighty fine ideas if you ask me. I own nothing and trouble nobody. It's as if I was living up in the air instead of down on the earth.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*contemptuously*): Nobody respects you for it. Here. (*Placing a glass of tea in front of him.*) But it's cold, and not very strong.

PERCHIKHIN (*holding the glass up to the light*): Hm, weakish. But we're thankful for each small thing. If it was strong it might get the better of me. As for people's respect—what do I want with it? I don't respect nobody, neither.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: As if anybody cared about having *your* respect!

PERCHIKHIN: And a very good thing they don't. I've noticed that folk as get their daily bread on the earth, snatch it out of each other's mouths. But my food comes from up above, from the heavenly birds, and so it's pure as the sky.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Well, is the wedding to take place soon?

PERCHIKHIN: Whose? Mine? The cuckoo marked as my mate ain't flown into our woods yet, the scamp! If she don't look out, she'll be too late: I'll be dead afore she gets there.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Stop talking nonsense and tell me straight: when are you giving her away?

PERCHIKHIN: Giving who away?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Your daughter. As if you didn't know!

PERCHIKHIN: Polya? Whenever she wants, if she's got anybody for me to give her to.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Have they been planning this long?

PERCHIKHIN: Who? What?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Stop pretending. Surely she told *you.*

PERCHIKHIN: Told me what?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: About the wedding.

PERCHIKHIN: Whose wedding?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Bah! An old man like you ought to be ashamed to make himself out an idiot.

PERCHIKHIN: Come, now, you just tell me plain and simple what's on your mind without getting mad.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: As if a person could talk to you!

PERCHIKHIN: Well, you're talking, and been doing it a good long time without getting nowhere.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*dryly and enviously*): When are you going to marry Polya to Nil?

PERCHIKHIN (*jumping up in amazement*): Polya to Nil?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Do you really mean to say she hasn't told you? A fine lot, these young folk! Her own father!

PERCHIKHIN (*joyfully*): Do you mean it? You must be joking. Nil? Crimpety crimpens! Think of that now! The monkeys! What a girl that Polya is! But you're sure you're not fooling? And here was me thinking Nil meant to marry Tatyana. Cross my heart. Everything pointed that way.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*offended*): As if we'd let Tatyana marry Nil! A good-for-nothing like him!

PERCHIKHIN: Nil? If I had ten daughters I'd close my eyes and hand the whole lot over to him. Nil? Why he ... he could feed a hundred mouths all by himself. Nil? Ho, ho!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*ironically*): When I look at you I think to myself: what a fine father-in-law Nil's getting!

PERCHIKHIN: Father-in-law? Ho, ho! This father-in-law don't want to be a burden to him nor to no-bo-dy! See that? My legs just dance of themselves! I'm free as a bird now! I'll live as I like now! Nobody'll catch a sight of me now! Off to the woods I'll go—farewell, everybody! What a girl that Polya is! Used to be I'd sit and think: what's to become of my poor little girl? It made me feel real bad, it did. I give her birth, but that's all I *could* give her. And now? Now I'll go wherever I please! Right about face, and off to the ends of the earth in search of the fire-bird!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Right about face? People don't turn their backs when luck comes their way.

PERCHIKHIN: Luck? The best luck I could have is to be able to go wherever I please. And Polya will be happy. She's sure to be with Nil. Such a strong, cheerful, simple lad! My brains are jumping for joy and my heart's full of larks. Was there ever such a lucky old man? Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la! Polya caught her Nil, hurrah!

(*Bessemenov enters. He is still in his coat and is carrying his cap in his hand.*)

BESSEMENOV: Drunk again!

PERCHIKHIN: Drunk with joy! Have you heard about Polya? (*Laughs gaily.*) She's going to marry Nil! Fine, eh?

BESSEMENOV (*hard and cold*): That don't concern us. We'll get what's due us anyhow.

PERCHIKHIN: And here was me thinking Nil meant to marry Tatyana!

BESSEMENOV: Wha-a-at?

PERCHIKHIN: Cross my heart. Anyone could see Tanya was all for it—first she'd cock one eye at him, then the other—you know how they do. And then all of a sudden—

BESSEMENOV (*calmly, to hide his fury*): Here's what I have to say to you, my good man: you may be a fool, but

it's high time you knew it's not decent to say such things about a girl. That's the first thing. (*Raising his voice.*) It's no concern of mine who your daughter looks at and how she looks at him and what sort of girl she is, but I do say one thing: If she marries Nil, good riddance, because neither of them are worth their salt, and from this day on I spit on both of them, even if they are both knee-deep in debt to me. That's the second thing. And here's the last: you and me may be distant relatives, but take a look at yourself—what do you look like? A tramp, that's what! Whoever allowed you to come into a respectable house in that state? In those filthy rags and muzhik sandals?

PERCHIKHIN: What's got into you, Vasily Vasilyevich? What are you saying? Is this the first time I've been here?

BESSEMENOV: I haven't counted the number of times and have no mind to. But one thing I do know: you can't have any respect for the master of this house if you come here looking like that. Again I say, what are you? A beggar, a tramp, a ragamuffin. That's my say. Get out!

PERCHIKHIN (*dumbfounded*): Vasily Vasilyevich! What have I done? What—

BESSEMENOV: Get out, I say! None of your talk!

PERCHIKHIN: Think what you're doing! I've never hurt—

BESSEMENOV: Get out! Get out before I—

PERCHIKHIN (*reproachfully, as he goes out*): For shame, old man! It's sad to see you like this. Makes me feel real sorry for you. Good day to you.

(*Bessemenov squares his shoulders and paces the floor in silence with firm, heavy steps. Akulina Ivanovna watches him furtively as she washes the tea-things. Her hands are shaking and she is muttering something to herself.*)

BESSEMENOV: What are you muttering? A spell?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: I'm praying, father, praying.

BESSEMENOV: Well, looks like I'm not to be mayor after all. Looks like it, damn them!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: What's that? Good gracious me, how can that be? But maybe you—

BESSEMENOV: Maybe I what? Fedka Dosekin, head of the locksmith guild, is aiming to be mayor. The upstart! The puppy!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Maybe they won't elect him. Don't lose heart yet.

BESSEMENOV: They will. It's clear they will. When I got there today he was sitting in the office blowing off steam. "Times," he says, "is hard; all of us," he says, "have got to hang together; everything," he says, "has got to be decided by all—all of us artisans, that is. What with the factories springing up," he says, "us workmen can't do things separately." But I says: "It's the Jews are to blame! It's the Jews as have to be kept in check. We ought to write a complaint against them to the Governor—tell him how they don't give us Russians a chance and ask him to send them packing." (*Tatyana opens the door softly and staggers over to her room.*) And he gives that smile of his and says: "And what are we to do with Russians as are worse than the Jews?" And I could tell by his voice it was me he had in mind. I let on I didn't understand, but I could see very well what he meant, the bastard! I listen a little and then I walks off to one side. "Just you wait!" thinks I to myself, "I'll cook your goose for you yet!" And just then Mikhail Kryukov, the stovemaker, comes up to me and says: "Looks like Dosekin had ought to be mayor," he says, and turns away, ashamed to look me in the eye. I felt like calling him the cheap jelly-boned Judas, he is!

(*Enter Yelena.*)

YELENA: Good morning, Vasily Vasilyevich! Good morning, Akulina Ivanovna!

BESSEMENOV (*coldly*): Ah, so it's you. Come in. What is it?

YELENA: I just wanted to give you the money for my lodgings.

BESSEMENOV (*more civil*): Very good. How much is here? Twenty-five rubles? You owe me another forty kopeks for two panes of glass in the hall window, and something—shall we make it twenty kopeks?—for the hinge your cook broke on the wood-shed.

YELENA (*laughing*): How very exact you are! But I'll have to give you three rubles. I have no change.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: You've had a sack of charcoal from me—that is, your cook has.

BESSEMENOV: How much does it cost?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Charcoal? Thirty-five a sack.

BESSEMENOV: Which makes, altogether, ninety-five. Two rubles and five kopeks change—here you are. As for being exact, you're quite right, young lady. It's exactness makes the world go round. The sun rises and sets exactly as has been laid down for it since the beginning of time, and once exactness is the law in heaven, it certainly ought to be the law on earth. Take you, for instance—you always pay your rent regular, right on the dot.

YELENA: I don't like to be in debt.

BESSEMENOV: Very commendable, very commendable. And so everyone trusts you.

YELENA: Well, good-bye. I must be going.

BESSEMENOV: Good day to you. (*Watches her go out.*) A pretty piece, drat her! And yet I'd like nothing better than to throw her out.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: It *would* be a good thing, father.

BESSEMENOV: On the other hand, so long as she's here we can keep an eye on her. If she moves, Pyotr's sure to go trailing her, and it'll be easier for her to catch him

without us in sight. And you mustn't forget she's regular with her rent and is always ready to pay these little extras. Hm ... Pyotr, of course, is a danger, and a big one....

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Maybe he don't think of marrying her. Maybe he's just—you know.

BESSEMENOV: If we could only be sure of that we could be easy in our minds, there'd be nothing to worry about. Better to have him here at home than going to brothels.

(*A hoarse moan comes from Tatyana's room.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*softly*): Oh!

BESSEMENOV (*just as softly*): What's that?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*she speaks under her breath and keeps glancing about as if listening for something*): Out in the hall, wasn't it?

BESSEMENOV (*loudly*): Must be the cat.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*hesitantly*): There's something I wanted to say to you, father....

BESSEMENOV: Well, go ahead and say it.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Don't you think you were a little hard on Perchikhin today? He's an inoffensive soul.

BESSEMENOV: If he's inoffensive, he won't take offense, and if he does, we haven't lost much. It's no great honour to have *him* as our friend. (*The moan is repeated—louder this time.*) Who's that? Mother—

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*flustered*): I don't know. Who could—what could it be?

BESSEMENOV (*rushing to Pyotr's room*): Anybody in here? Pyotr!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*rushing after him in horror*): Pyotr! Pyotr!

TATYANA (*calling hoarsely*): Save me! Mother! Save me! Save me! (*Bessemenov and Akulina Ivanovna rush out of Pyotr's room and towards Tatyana's without a word, hesitating at the door for a second as if afraid,*

*then pushing it open simultaneously. They are met by Tatyana's cries.*) Oh-h-h, how it burns! A drink! Save me!

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*rushes out of the room and shouts into the hall*): Help! Help, good people! Pyotr! (*From Tatyana's room comes the dull voice of Bessemenov, saying*: "What is it, daughter? What is it? What's the matter with you, lovey?")

TATYANA: Water. I'm dying. Everything's burning up inside me. Oh, God!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Hurry! Come quick! Help!

BESSEMENOV (*from inside the room*): Call the doctor! Quick!

PYOTR (*running up*): What's the matter? What's happened?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*clutching his sleeve and gasping*): Tatyana! She's dying!

PYOTR (*wrenching free*): Let me go!

TETEREV (*pulling on his jacket as he comes in*): What is it, a fire?

BESSEMENOV: The doctor! Run for the doctor, Pyotr! Offer him 25 rubles!

PYOTR (*rushing out of Tatyana's room and speaking to Teterev*): The doctor! Go for the doctor! Tell him—poisoning. A young woman. Ammonia. Hurry! Hurry!

(*Teterev runs out into the hall.*)

STEPANIDA (*running in*): My stars!

TATYANA: Pyotr! I'm burning up! I'm dying! I don't want to die! Save me! A drink!

PYOTR: How much did you take? When did you do it? Speak!

BESSEMENOV: My own daughter! My little girl!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: To do such a thing to yourself! My poor little dove!

PYOTR: Go away, mother. Take her out, Stepanida. Go away, I tell you. (*Yelena runs into Tatyana's room.*) Take mother out.

(*An old woman comes into the hall and stands in the doorway glancing furtively into the room and muttering to herself.*)

YELENA (*leading Akulina Ivanovna out of Tatyana's room and whispering to her*): That's all right, don't worry, it's not dangerous.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: My treasure! My own darling girl! What have I done to her? How have I wronged her?

YELENA: It will pass. Everything will be all right when the doctor comes. What a thing to have happened!

OLD WOMAN (*taking Akulina Ivanovna's other arm*): Don't lose heart. Worse things happen. Merchant Sitanov's coachman, for instance—the horse bashed his whole side in—

AKULINA IVANOVNA: My darling, my precious. What shall I do? My only one! (*They take her out.*)

(*Tatyana's cries mingle with her father's hoarse voice and Pyotr's sharp, nervous interjections. A chair is overturned; there is a clatter of dishes, a squeaking of bed-springs, the thud of a falling pillow. Several times Stepanida, her hair on end, her mouth hanging open, her eyes popping out of her head, rushes out of the room to snatch a cup or a plate out of the sideboard, invariably breaking something. Gaping faces are seen in the doorway of the hall, but no one dares to come into the room. A young lad, a house painter's apprentice, hops through the door, peeks into Tatyana's room and runs back, announcing in a stage-whisper*: "She's dying!" *A barrel-organ strikes up a tune out in the*

*street, but is instantly hushed. From the hall comes a low murmur of conversation*: "Killed her?" "Who?" "Her father?" "He warned her—'You watch your step, young lady,' he says." "On the head." "Do you know what with?" "That's a lie—she cut her own throat." *A woman's voice asks:* "Was she married?" *Someone is heard to cluck sympathetically. The Old Woman comes out of Bessemenov's room, snatches up a bun as she passes the table and hides it under her shawl, then joins the crowd out in the hall.*)

OLD WOMAN: Sh! She's dying.

MAN'S VOICE: What's her name?

OLD WOMAN: Liza.

WOMAN'S VOICE: What made her do it?

OLD WOMAN: Far back as Assumption Day he says to her: "Liza," he says—

(*Movement in the crowd. The doctor and Teterev enter. The doctor goes directly to Tatyana's room without taking off his hat or coat. Teterev glances into the room, then walks away frowning. Moans, voices, sounds of people moving about, come from the sick chamber. From Bessemenov's room comes the wailing of Akulina Ivanovna and her cries*: "Let me go! I've got to go to her!" *Out of the murmur of the crowd in the hall rise individual voices, saying*: "He's the choir singer." "You don't say!" "Yes, he is." "From John the Baptist's.")

TETEREV (*going toward the hall*): What are you doing here? Get out, all of you!

OLD WOMAN (*at the door*): Move along, good people, move along. This is none of your business. None of your business, this.

TETEREV: Who are you? What do you want?

OLD WOMAN: I'm a vegetable vendor—spring onions, cucumbers—

TETEREV: What are you doing here?

OLD WOMAN: I was on my way to Semyagina's—she is my son's godmother—

TETEREV: What are you doing here, I say?

OLD WOMAN: Just happened to be passing and heard a noise, thought it might be a fire—

TETEREV: Well?

OLD WOMAN: And came in. Came to have a look at trouble.

TETEREV: Get along with you. Clear the hall.

STEPANIDA (*running up to Teterev*): Fetch a pail of water—quick!

(*An old greybeard with his face tied up in a handkerchief looks through the door, winks at Teterev, and says*: "She stole a bun off your table!" *Teterev strides into the hall, pushing people out into the street. Noise and confusion. A boy cries*: "Ouch!" *Somebody laughs, somebody else says reproachfully*: "Stop pushing.")

TETEREV (*unseen*): Out you go! Quick!

PYOTR (*poking his head through the door*): Quiet! (*Turning back into the room.*) Go, father. Mother needs you. Do go. (*Calling into the hall.*) Don't let anyone in!

(*Bessemenov walks unsteadily out of Tatyana's room. When he reaches the table he sinks into a chair and sits staring dully into space for a few seconds, then gets up and goes into his own room, where Akulina Ivanovna and Yelena can be heard talking.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA: As if I didn't love her! As if I didn't take the best of care of her!

YELENA: Calm yourself.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Father! Oh, father! What—

*(The speech is cut off by the closing of the door. Now the big room is empty. From the left comes the sound of muffled voices in Bessemenov's room, from the right the groans of Tatyana, low talk, and the little noises made by those attending her. Teterev brings in a pail of water, puts it down outside Tatyana's door, and knocks gently. Stepanida opens the door and takes the pail, then comes out into the big room, wiping the sweat off her forehead.)*

TEREV: Well?

STEPANIDA: Looks like everything'll be all right.

TEREV: Is that what the doctor says?

STEPANIDA: Uh-huh. But—(*Gives a disparaging wave of her hand.*) He says not to let her father and mother in.

TEREV: Is she better?

STEPANIDA: Who knows? She's stopped moaning. Her face is green as green and her eyes are this big! Lies dead still. (*Reproachfully.*) I told them so! How many times did I tell them to get her a husband! A husband, I says, is what she needs. But they didn't listen to me, and here's what they get for it! As if a girl could go on this long without a husband! And then she didn't believe in God. "None of your prayers for me!" says she. "None of your bowing and crossing for me!" Well, and so here you are!

TEREV: Hold your tongue, you crow!

YELENA (*entering*): How is she?

TEREV: I don't know. The doctor seems to think there's no danger.

YELENA: What a blow for her father and mother! I feel so sorry for them!

*(Teterev shrugs his shoulders without commenting.)*

STEPANIDA (*running out of the room*): Goodness, I've forgot the stove!

YELENA: Whatever made her do it? What happened? Poor Tatyana! It must have hurt horribly. (*Makes a face and shudders.*) It must have, don't you think?

TETEREV: I don't know. Ammonia is one thing I've never drunk.

YELENA: How can you joke at such a time?

TETEREV: I'm not joking.

YELENA (*goes over to Pyotr's room and peeps through the door*): Is Pyotr—Pyotr Vasilyevich—still in her room?

TETEREV: Must be if he hasn't come out.

YELENA (*thoughtfully*): I can imagine how hard he's taking it. (*Pause.*) Whenever I ... if I happen to see something of this sort I ... oh, I just *hate* misfortune!

TETEREV (*smiling*): Very praiseworthy!

YELENA: Do you understand what I mean? I feel like taking it and stamping on it—trampling it to death!

TETEREV: What? Misfortune?

YELENA: Yes. I'm not afraid of it. I hate it. I like to be happy, to have lots of people around me, and to be always doing something new. I know how to make life pleasant for myself and those around me.

TETEREV: Ultra-praiseworthy!

YELENA: And something else—I'll confess to you: I'm dreadfully hard-hearted! I don't like people who are unfortunate, and some people are always unfortunate, no matter what you do for them. If you put the sun on their heads instead of a hat—could anything be lovelier?—they'd still go about sighing: "Ah, I'm so unlucky! So lonely! Nobody loves me! Life is a bore! Ah! Oh! Oo!" Whenever I meet a person like that I want to make him more miserable than ever.

TETEREV: Bless your heart! Listen, I'll make a confession too: I can't bear to hear women philosophize, but when *you* philosophize I could kiss your hand.

YELENA (*coyly*): Only my hand? And only when I philosophize? (*Catching herself.*) But goodness! What am I doing? Joking—making fun, when in there—someone is suffering—

TETEREV (*nodding towards Bessemenov's door*): And in there, too. And wherever you point your finger someone is suffering. It's a bad habit people have got into.

YELENA: But they really *do* suffer.

TETEREV: They do.

YELENA: And so they ought to be pitied.

TETEREV: Not always. And perhaps never. It's much better to help them than to pity them.

YELENA: You can't help everybody. And you can't help *anybody* if you don't pity him first.

TETEREV: This is how I look at it, young lady: suffering is born of desire, and there are two kinds of desire—that worthy of respect and that unworthy of it. A man should be helped to satisfy desires that make him well and strong and that, ennobling him, raise him above the animal.

YELENA (*not following him*): Perhaps. Perhaps you're right. But what's happening in there? Do you suppose she's gone to sleep? It's so quiet. They're whispering. The old folk, too—they've hidden themselves away in their corner. How strange! All of a sudden—noise, confusion, cries, moans! Then, just as suddenly—not a sound, not a movement.

TETEREV: That's life for you. People shout until they get tired, then they take a rest. When they've had a rest they start shouting again. Here in this house, everything quiets down very quickly—shouts of pain and shouts of laughter alike. Every shock is like the slapping of a mud puddle with a stick. And the last sound is always the outcry of the Commonplace, the household god of these people. It's she who always has the last word here, be it of triumph or of rage.

YELENA (*thoughtfully*): I had a better time when I lived in the jail. My husband was a gambler; he drank, too, and often went shooting. Ours was an out-of-the-way little town and most of the people in it were sort of—well, passé. I had lots of free time, but I didn't go anywhere or see anybody but the prisoners. They were fond of me. An amusing lot when you get to know them. Awfully sweet and simple, really they are. Sometimes when I looked at them I couldn't believe they were thieves and murderers and all sorts of criminals. Once I said to one of the murderers: "Did you really kill somebody?" "Yes, I did, Yelena Nikolayevna," he said. "I really did. Can't be helped." And it seemed to me that he—that murderer—had taken somebody else's guilt upon himself, that he was only a stone that somebody else had thrown. I used to buy them books and I saw to it that there were playing cards and draughts-boards in every cell. And I gave them tobacco. And wine, the least bit. When they were let out for exercise they would play ball and nine-pins. They were just like children. Whenever I read them funny stories they would roar with laughter—like children. I bought some song-birds and cages and put one in every cell. They loved their birds almost as much as they loved me. They adored to have me wear bright clothes—a red waist or a yellow skirt. They like bright, cheerful colours. I used to dress up for them on purpose. (*Sighs.*) It was very pleasant living with them. Three years went by before I knew it. When my husband was killed by the horse I cried less at losing him than at having to leave the jail. It was such a pity! And the prisoners were sorry, too. (*Glancing about the room.*) It's not nearly so nice living here. There's something—something sinister about this house. It's not the people who are bad, it's something else. But there, I've got myself into an awful mood—feeling quite low. Here we are talking away, you and I, while in that room a woman may be dying.

TETEREV (*serenely*): And we're not sorry.

YELENA (*quickly*): Aren't you sorry?

TETEREV: No. And you aren't either.

YELENA: No, I'm not. I suppose it's wrong, but somehow I don't feel that it is. That happens sometimes: you know a thing's wrong, but it doesn't seem to be. Strange as it may seem, I feel more sorry for him—for Pyotr Vasilyevich—than for her. I feel awfully sorry for him. He's miserable here, isn't he?

TETEREV: Everybody's miserable here.

POLYA (*entering*): Hullo!

YELENA (*jumps up and goes over to her*): Sh! Do you know what's happened? Tatyana has taken poison!

POLYA: Wha-at?

YELENA: Yes, she has. The doctor and her brother are in there with her now.

POLYA: Is she dying? Is she going to die?

YELENA: Nobody knows.

POLYA: What did she do it for? Did she say?

YELENA: I don't know. I don't think so.

PYOTR (*thrusting a frowzy head through the door*): Yelena Nikolayevna, just a minute. (*Yelena hurries over.*)

POLYA (*to Teterev*): Why are you looking at me like that?

TETEREV: How many times have you asked me the same thing!

POLYA: Naturally—if you keep looking at me in the same way. What do you do it for? (*Going over to him and speaking sternly.*) Do you think I'm to blame for this?

TETEREV (*with a little laugh*): Do you feel guilty?

POLYA: I feel that I dislike you more and more—that's what I feel! But tell me, how did it happen?

TETEREV: Yesterday she was given a little jolt, and, being rather shaky on her legs, today she fell down. That's all.

POLYA: It's not true.

TETEREV: What's not?

POLYA: I know what you're hinting at, but it's not true. Nil—

TETEREV: Nil? What's Nil got to do with it?

POLYA: Nothing. Nor have I. Neither of us has. You—but you're wrong. I know you think it's our fault but what could we do? I love him and he loves me. It began long ago.

TETEREV (*gravely*): I don't blame you in the least. It's you who feel guilty and that makes you try to explain. Why should you? I like you. Who was it told you over and over—constantly, insistently—to get out of this house, to keep away from it? There's something unwholesome here that poisons the spirit. I was the one who told you.

POLYA: Well?

TETEREV: Nothing. I just wanted to say that if you had taken my advice, you wouldn't have had to go through what you're going through now. That's all.

POLYA: I see. But how could she have done such a thing? Is her life in danger? What did she take?

TETEREV: I don't know.

(*Pyotr and the doctor come out of the room.*)

PYOTR: Please go and help Yelena Nikolayevna, Polya.

TETEREV (*to Pyotr*): How is she?

DOCTOR: Nothing serious. If the patient weren't so unstrung there would be hardly any ill effects. She drank very little—burned her oesophagus slightly and some of the alcohol got into her stomach, but it was instantly thrown up.

PYOTR: You must be tired, doctor. Sit down.

DOCTOR: Thanks. She'll not be feeling herself for a

week or so. I had an interesting case the other day: a house painter drank a glass of varnish instead of beer—

*(Bessemenov opens the door of his room and stands there without a word, staring in gloomy expectation at the doctor.)*

PYOTR: Don't worry, father. There's no danger.

DOCTOR: No, there isn't, I assure you. In two or three days she'll be back on her feet.

BESSEMENOV: Do you mean it?

DOCTOR: I do.

BESSEMENOV: Thank you. If you mean it, if it's true there's no danger, I'm very grateful to you. Pyotr . . . er . . . come here.

*(Pyotr goes over to him. They both disappear inside the room, from which comes the sound of whispering and the clink of coin.)*

TETEREV (*to the doctor*): And what happened to the house painter?

DOCTOR: Eh? What's that?

TETEREV: The house painter—what happened to him?

DOCTOR: Him? Oh, nothing. He got well. Uh . . . it seems to me I've met you before, haven't I?

TETEREV: Perhaps.

DOCTOR: Weren't you once in hospital with typhoid fever?

TETEREV: I was.

DOCTOR (*with satisfaction*): See that? I was sure I had seen you somewhere before. Wait—it was last spring, wasn't it? I think I even remember your name.

TETEREV: And I remember you.

DOCTOR: You do?

TETEREV: Yes. When I was getting well I asked you to increase my food rations and you made a face and said:

"Be thankful to get this much. There are more than enough tramps and drunks like you in the world."

DOCTOR (*flabbergasted*): But that's ... that's ... I beg your pardon, but you ... your name ... that is, I'm Dr. Nikolai Troyerukov, and—

TETEREV (*going over to him*): And I'm Terenty-the-Oracle, Cavalier of the Green Bottle. (*The doctor backs away from him.*) Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you.

(*Teterev walks past him into the hall. The doctor watches him open-mouthed, fanning himself with his hat. Enter Pyotr.*)

DOCTOR (*glancing furtively towards the hall*): But I must be going. Others are waiting for me. If she complains of pain, repeat the drops. But there shouldn't be any great pain. Good day. Oh ... er ... that gentleman who was just here—a very interesting type. Is he ... er ... a relative?

PYOTR: No, a lodger.

DOCTOR: I see. Very interesting. Highly original. Good day. Thank you.

(*Pyotr sees him out. Bessemenov and Akulina Ivanovna come out of their room and cautiously tiptoe over to Tatyana's door.*)

BESSEMENOV: Wait. Don't go in. There's not a sound. Maybe she's asleep. We mustn't wake her up. (*Leads Akulina Ivanovna over to the trunk in the corner.*) Well, mother, we've lived to see the gala day! All the talk, all the gossip there'll be now! No end of it!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: For shame, father. What are you saying? Who cares? Let them talk their heads off so long as she gets well. Let them shout the news from the housetops if it gives them any pleasure.

BESSEMENOV: Yes, of course. You're right, only ... tck, tck, tck! Don't you see? We're disgraced.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Disgraced? Why?

BESSEMENOV: To have your own daughter take poison! What does that make us, you and me? What did we do to her? How did we treat her? Were we beasts to her? They'll say all sorts of things about us. I don't mind, I can stand anything for the sake of my children, only why should I? What have I done to deserve it? That's what I'd like to know. My children! Not a word can I get out of them. What goes on inside of them? I don't know. What's on their minds? I can't guess. That's what hurts.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: I know. It hurts me too. After all, I'm their mother. Day after day I wear myself out for them, and not a word of thanks for it. I know. It wouldn't be so bad if they were well and happy, but to have a thing like this happen!

POLYA (*coming out of Tatyana's room*): Shh! She's going to sleep.

BESSEMENOV (*getting up*): How is she? Can we go in to see her?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: I'll be so quiet! Just her father and me?

POLYA: The doctor said not to let anyone see her.

BESSEMENOV (*suspiciously*): How do you know? You didn't see the doctor.

POLYA: Yelena Nikolayevna told me so.

BESSEMENOV: Is she in there? How do you like that? Strangers can see her, but her own folk can't. Very strange.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: We'll have dinner in the kitchen, so's not to disturb her, poor dear! And me not allowed so much as a peep at her!

*(With a despairing wave of her hand she goes out into the hall. Polya stands leaning against the sideboard gazing at the door of Tatyana's room. Her brows are drawn, her lips compressed, her body taut. Bessemenov sits at the table as if waiting for something.)*

POLYA (*softly*): Was father here today?

BESSEMENOV: It's not your father you want. What's your father to you? I know who you want. (*Polya looks at him in amazement.*) Yes, your father was here in his filthy rags, not a trace of decency about him. And still you'd ought to respect him as your father.

POLYA: I do. Why should you tell me that?

BESSEMENOV: To let you know it. Your father's a tramp, but even so it's up to you to bow to his will. But how can you be expected to appreciate what a father is? You have no feelings—none of you young folk have. Look at you—a girl without any means, without so much as a roof over your head. You'd ought to be humble, to be kind and considerate to everybody, and instead of that you air your own opinions and make yourself out to be as good as educated folk. And now you're about to get married, while in that room lies one as almost took her own life—

POLYA: What do you mean? Why should you say such a thing?

BESSEMENOV (*with the irritation of one who has lost the thread of his thought*): Think it over. Try to understand. That's why I'm saying it, so's you'll understand. Who are you? A nobody, and yet—you're getting married. And there's my daughter.... What are you standing there for? Go into the kitchen! Get busy! I'll keep watch, you get out. (*Polya looks at him in perplexity, then turns to go out.*) Just a minute. I ... er ... was sharp with your father today.

POLYA: Why?

BESSEMENOV: None of your business. Run along.

(*The amazed Polya goes out. Bessemenov goes softly over to Tatyana's door and opens it a crack to peep in. Yelena comes out and closes the door behind her.*)

YELENA: Don't go in, she seems to be sleeping. Don't disturb her.

BESSEMENOV: Hm. You can disturb us as much as you like, but we have no right to disturb anybody.

YELENA (*surprised*): But she's ill.

BESSEMENOV: I know. I know everything.

(*Goes out into the hall. Yelena shrugs her shoulders as she watches him. Then she goes over to the window, sits down on the couch, clasps her hands behind her head, and becomes lost in thought. A smile plays over her lips and she closes her eyes dreamily. Pyotr comes in looking glum and dishevelled. He tosses his head as if to free it of something. On seeing Yelena he stops.*)

YELENA (*without opening her eyes*): Who's there?

PYOTR: Why are you smiling? Strange to see anyone smiling now, after—

YELENA (*glancing at him*): Grumpy? Tired? Poor boy! I feel so sorry for you!

PYOTR (*sitting down beside her*): I feel sorry for myself.

YELENA: You ought to go away somewhere.

PYOTR: I know I ought. What am I doing here? I can't bear this life.

YELENA: What kind of life would you like to live? Do tell me. I often ask you that, but you never answer.

PYOTR: It's hard to be frank.

YELENA: Even with me?

PYOTR: Even with you. How do I know what you think of me? Or how you'll take what I say? Sometimes it seems to me that you....

YELENA: That I what?

PYOTR: That you....

YELENA: That I like you. I do, I do! A lot! You're a dear, darling boy.

PYOTR (*impetuously*): I'm not a boy. I've done a lot of thinking. Listen, tell me honestly—do you approve of all the fuss Nil, Shishkin, Tsvetayeva and all those other loud-mouths make? All this reading aloud of weighty books and this staging of plays for the workers? Do you think it's a sensible way of spending your time? And all their activities—are they really so important? Worth devoting one's whole life to? What do you think?

YELENA: I'm ignorant, darling. I can't judge, I'm so frivolous, you know. They seem nice to me—Nil and Shishkin and all the others. They're bright and cheerful and always doing something. I like cheerful people. I'm cheerful myself. But why do you ask?

PYOTR: Because they get on my nerves. If they enjoy living that way, let them—I don't object; I don't object to anything, but why should they object to the way *I* live? Why should they accord some special significance to what they do? Why should they call me a coward and an egoist?

YELENA (*putting her hand on his head*): Poor dear, you're worn out.

PYOTR: No, I'm not, I'm just annoyed. I have a right to live the way I want to —the way *I* want to!—haven't I?

YELENA (*playing with his hair*): That's much too deep for me. I *do* live the way I want to, according to my own lights, and nobody could talk me into going into a convent for love or money. If they forced me into one I'd run away or jump in the river.

PYOTR: You spend more time with them than with me. You like them better than you do me. I feel it. But what I wanted to tell you was—they're empty barrels.

YELENA (*surprised*): They're what?

PYOTR: Empty barrels. Remember the fable about the empty barrels?

YELENA: Yes. But then—am I an empty barrel too?

PYOTR: Oh, no! You're full of life. You're refreshing, like a cold spring deep in the woods.

YELENA: Brr! Am I really so cold?

PYOTR: Please don't make a joke of it. For me this moment is . . . is . . . ahem. And you find it funny. Why? Am I so amusing? I want to live, to live as I like, as I see fit!

YELENA: Then why don't you? Who's stopping you?

PYOTR: There *is* someone—or something. Whenever I make up my mind to live alone and independent I seem to hear someone say I mustn't.

YELENA: Your conscience?

PYOTR: Oh no. I haven't. . . . Well, I wouldn't think of committing a crime. I only want to be free . . . that is. . . .

YELENA (*bending over him*): That isn't what you want to say. It's so much simpler than you make it. I'll have to help you, poor boy, so that you won't get all tangled up in such simple things.

PYOTR: You're laughing at me, Yelena Nikolayevna! It's cruel of you. What I want to say is: here am I, baring my soul to you. . . .

YELENA: That's not it either.

PYOTR: I suppose I'm a weak sort. Life is too much for me. I'm aware of the commonplaceness of my surroundings, but I can't change or improve them. I want to go away, to live alone—

YELENA (*taking his head in her hands*): Repeat what I say after me: "I love you."

PYOTR: Oh, I do, I do! But again you're joking.

YELENA: No, I'm not. I'm perfectly serious. I've had my mind made up for a long time to marry you. Maybe I oughtn't to, but I want to dreadfully.

PYOTR: God, how happy I am! I love you like—(*Tatyana is heard to moan. Pyotr jumps up and looks about*

*him wild-eyed. Yelena, unperturbed, gets up too.*) That must have been Tatyana. And here we are—

YELENA (*going to Tatyana's room*): We aren't doing anything wrong.

TATYANA: A drink. Give me a drink.

YELENA: I'm coming.

(*Smiles at Pyotr and goes out. Pyotr stands clutching his head in his hands and staring in front of him. The hall door opens and Akulina Ivanovna stands in the doorway.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*in a loud whisper*): Pyotr! Pyotr, where are you?

PYOTR: Here.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Come and have dinner.

PYOTR: I don't want any. I'm not coming.

YELENA (*coming out of Tatyana's room*): He's coming with me.

(*Akulina Ivanovna darts a look of displeasure at her and goes out.*)

PYOTR (*throwing himself at Yelena*): How wicked of us! Here we are . . . while she's. . . .

YELENA: Come along. What's wicked about it? In the theatre they always give you something light after the heavy scenes. We need it even more in real life.

(*Pyotr presses close to her as she takes his arm and leads him out.*)

TATYANA (*moaning hoarsely*): Yelena! Yelena!

(*Polya comes running in.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT IV

### THE SAME SETTING

*Evening. A lamp is lighted on the table. Polya is laying the table for tea. Tatyana, recuperating, is lying on the sofa, almost beyond reach of the lamp light. Tsvetayeva is sitting beside her.*

TATYANA (*softly, reproachfully*): Do you think I don't *want* to face life as cheerfully and bravely as you do? I do, but—I can't. I was born without faith. I learned to think.

TSVETAYEVA: That's it—you think too much. And is it worth while improving your mind just for the sake of pondering things? Thought is a good thing, but you've got to have imagination, too. Otherwise life will be an insufferable bore and a burden. You've got to be able to catch a vision of the future—at least from time to time.

(*Polya smiles affectionately as she listens to Tsvetayeva.*)

TATYANA: And what do you see in that future?

TSVETAYEVA: Whatever you wish to see.

TATYANA: That's it, you've got to have a good imagination.

TSVETAYEVA: You've got to have faith.

TATYANA: In what?

TSVETAYEVA: In your dream. Whenever I look into the eyes of my schoolboys, I think: here's Novikov—when he finishes school he'll go to the gymnasium and then to the university—probably become a doctor. He's a capable child, very good and serious, with a broad brow. He takes to people easily. He'll work very hard, with no thought of gain, and people will come to love and respect him, I'm sure. And some day, when he's looking back on his childhood, he'll remember how his teacher Tsvetayeva hit him on the nose when she was playing with him during the break. Or maybe he won't. It doesn't matter. But he probably will; he's very fond of me. And then there's that ragged, dirty-faced, absent-minded Klokov. Always arguing and getting into mischief. An orphan—lives with his uncle, a night watchman. They're poor as church mice, but he's a proud, bold little fellow. I think he'll be a journalist when he grows up. If you ever knew how many interesting boys there are in my class! I'm always guessing what will become of them—what role they're destined to play in life. It's great fun. A mere trifle, Tanya, but you can't imagine what pleasure it gives me!

TATYANA: And you yourself? Perhaps your pupils have brilliant futures awaiting them, but you? Where will you be then?

TSVETAYEVA: Are you hinting that I'll be dead? Oh, no! I mean to live a good long time!

POLYA (*breathing the words softly*): What a darling you are, Masha!

TSVETAYEVA (*smiling at Polya*): Thanks, linnet! I'm not sentimental, Tanya, but when I think of the future, of the people of the future and the sort of lives they'll live, a sweet and solemn feeling comes over me—the feeling that comes on one of those clear, crisp autumn days—you know the kind I mean, when a placid sun shines in a clear sky and the air is heady and transparent, lending

sharpness to distant outlines—bracing, but not cold; sunny, but not hot.

TATYANA: Dreams! Dreams! Perhaps you and Nil and Shishkin and others of your sort can live on dreams, but I can't.

TSVETAYEVA: But look, they're not just dreams—

TATYANA: Nothing has ever seemed real to me. Nothing. Except perhaps this me and those walls. When I say "yes" or "no" it isn't because of conviction. It's just because I have to say something. And sometimes when I've said "no" I stop and wonder whether I was right. Shouldn't I have said "yes"?

TSVETAYEVA: You enjoy being like that. Be honest: aren't you the least bit enamoured of that "dual personality"? Or perhaps you're afraid to put faith in anything. After all, faith carries obligations.

TATYANA: I don't know—I just don't know. Convert me to your faith. You convert others. (*Laughs softly.*) I feel sorry for the people who believe you. After all, it's only an illusion. Life always has been and always will be just as it is now—murky and stifling.

TSVETAYEVA (*smiling*): Will it? Perhaps it won't.

POLYA (*as if to herself*): It certainly won't.

TATYANA: What did you say?

POLYA: I said it won't.

TSVETAYEVA: Good for you, linnet!

TATYANA: Another one of your unfortunate believers! But ask her why it won't? What is going to change it? Ask her that!

POLYA (*going over to them softly*): It's got to change because ... because ... at present life isn't for everybody. Very few people really live. Most of them have no time to. All they have time to do is work—earn their bread. But when they too—

SHISHKIN (*entering briskly*): Hullo, everybody! (*To Polya.*) Good evening, fair daughter of King Duncan!

POLYA: Of King who?

SHISHKIN: Caught! So you haven't read the Heine I left you two weeks ago? Good evening, Tatyana Vasilyevna.

TATYANA (*holding out her hand*): She has no time for books now. She's going to get married.

SHISHKIN: She is? Who to?

TSVETAYEVA: Nil.

SHISHKIN: In that case I congratulate you, but in general I don't see much point in getting married, raising families, and all that sort of thing. Marriage, in modern conditions—

TATYANA: Oh, don't! Spare us! We've already heard your views on the subject.

SHISHKIN: Very well, I'll spare you. I have no time, anyway. (*To Tsvetayeva.*) Are you coming with me? Good. Where's Pyotr?

POLYA: He's upstairs.

SHISHKIN: Hm . . . no, I won't go for him. You just tell him, Tatyana Vasilyevna, or perhaps you, Polya, that I . . . er . . . that my lessons with Prokhorov . . . that is, that I'm without anyone to tutor again.

TSVETAYEVA: You certainly have no luck.

TATYANA: Have you quarrelled with him?

SHISHKIN: Not particularly. I tried to be civil.

TSVETAYEVA: But how did it happen? I thought you were pleased with Prokhorov.

SHISHKIN: I was, damn it all. And when you get down to it, I suppose he's better than most. He's not stupid, but he's a braggart, and a windbag, and—(*Suddenly exploding.*) a beast!

TATYANA: I'm afraid Pyotr won't get you any more tutoring to do after this.

SHISHKIN: He'll probably be angry with me.

TSVETAYEVA: What came between you and Prokhorov?

SHISHKIN: Can you believe it? It turns out he's a Jew-hater.

TATYANA: What do you care?

SHISHKIN: But that's indecent! A person who pretends to be cultivated can't harbour feelings like that. He's just a foul bourgeois, that's what he is! Take this, for instance: his parlourmaid began to attend school on Sundays. Excellent! He himself gave me a long and tiresome harangue on the value of these schools—God knows I didn't ask him to. He even boasted of being one of the initiators of the movement. Well, one Sunday he came home, and—oh horrors!—instead of having the door opened to him by the parlourmaid, it was opened by the nursemaid! Where's the parlourmaid? says he. At school, says she. What a row there was! And that was the end of the parlourmaid's schooling. How do you like that?

(*Tatyana shrugs her shoulders and says nothing.*)

TSVETAYEVA: And all the talking he does!

SHISHKIN: Pyotr's always finding cads like him for me to tutor.

TATYANA (*dryly*): If I'm not mistaken, you were pleased with the treasurer you gave lessons to.

SHISHKIN: I was. He's quite a decent old fellow, but a numismatist. He was forever poking coppers under my nose and raving about Caesars and the Diadochi and Pharaohs in their chariots. I stood it as long as I could, and one day I said to him, "Listen, Vikenty Vasilyevich, you're wasting your time on nonsense. Why, any old cobble-stone out in the street is more antique than your coins." That was a shock to the old boy. "Do you mean to say I've been devoting fifteen years of my life to nonsense?" he says. There was no denying it, and so.... When he paid me off he held back half a ruble. Kept it for his collection, I guess. But that was nothing. This affair with Prokhorov ... hm.... (*Glumly.*) It's deucedly hard to be like me. (*Briskly.*) Marya Nikitishna, it's time for us to be going!

TSVETAYEVA: I'm ready. Good-bye, Tatyana. Tomorrow's Sunday, I'll come and see you in the morning.

TATYANA: Thanks. Sometimes I feel as if I were a sort of weed that people trip over—nothing pretty or useful about me—I just grow underfoot for people to catch their toes in.

SHISHKIN: Ugh, what a horrid idea!

TSVETAYEVA: It hurts to hear you say such things, Tatyana.

TATYANA: But wait. I think—or rather I know—yes, at last I know one bitter truth: he who is without faith is not fit to live; he must die.

TSVETAYEVA (*smiling*): Must he really? Perhaps he mustn't?

TATYANA: You're making fun of me. Have you nothing better to do?

TSVETAYEVA: But I'm not, darling, really I'm not. It's your illness makes you say such things—you're tired and ill. Well, good-bye for the present. And don't think we're really so cruel and hard-hearted.

TATYANA: Run along. Good-bye.

SHISHKIN (*to Polya*): Well, when are you going to read Heine? Oh, I forgot, you're getting married. I could say a thing or two against that, but ... ahem! Good-bye.

(*Goes out behind Tsvetayeva. Pause.*)

POLYA: Mass will be over soon, I guess. Shall I have the samovar heated?

TATYANA: I don't think mother and father will want tea. But do as you like. (*Pause.*) Silence used to get on my nerves, but now I crave it.

POLYA: Isn't it time for you to take your medicine?

TATYANA: Not yet. There's been so much noise and confusion. Shishkin's a noisy creature.

POLYA (*going over to her*): He's very nice.

TATYANA: Kind-hearted, but not very bright.

POLYA: He's decent, and he's got courage. He's always ready to stand up for what he thinks is right. See how he stood up for that parlourmaid? Most people don't give a straw how parlourmaids and other servants of the rich live. Even if they did, they wouldn't take the trouble to put in a good word for them.

TATYANA (*without looking at Polya*): Aren't you afraid to marry Nil, Polya?

POLYA (*surprised*): Why should I be? Of course not.

TATYANA: Well, I would be, in your place. I say this to you because I'm fond of you. You aren't like him. You're a simple girl, but he has read a lot. He's educated. He may get tired of you. Have you ever thought of that, Polya?

POLYA: No. I know he loves me.

TATYANA (*tetchily*): As if one could ever know that!

(*Teterev comes in with the samovar.*)

POLYA: Thanks. I'll go for the milk. (*Goes out.*)

TETEREV (*his face is puffy with a hang-over*): As I was coming through the kitchen, Stepanida spied me and asked me to bring in the samovar. "Be so kind," says she. "I'll give you a pickle for it—a nice juicy pickle." I couldn't resist, glutton that I am.

TATYANA: Have you been to mass already?

TETEREV: No, I didn't go today. I've got a headache. How are you, feeling better?

TATYANA: Yes, thank you. I get asked that twenty times a day. I'd feel better still if this house weren't so noisy. All this hurly-burly upsets me—everybody shouting and rushing about. Father is always scolding Nil, mother is always sighing, and I just lie here watching them, unable to see any point to what they—all of them—call living.

TETEREV: Why not? It's a curious business, living is. I'm an outsider, I take no part in the affairs of this

earth—just go on living out of curiosity—and yet I find that life is not without interest.

TATYANA: You make no demands on it, I know. But what do you find so interesting about it?

TETEREV: People are just tuning up. I like to hear musicians tune their horns and fiddles before the curtain goes up. You catch certain true notes—sometimes a lovely phrase. It makes you anxious to know what's coming—what they're going to play, who the soloists will be, what the opera will be about. The same thing is happening here—people are just tuning up.

TATYANA: That may be true of the theatre. The conductor comes in, waves his baton, and the musicians give a poor, soulless rendition of some outworn piece. But here? What are these musicians capable of rendering? Nothing, it seems to me.

TETEREV: Something *fortissimo.*

TATYANA: Time will tell. (*Pause. Teterev lights his pipe.*) Why do you smoke a pipe instead of cigarettes?

TETEREV: More convenient. I'm a tramp, you know. I spend most of the year on the road. I'll be off again soon—as soon as winter sets in for good.

TATYANA: Where?

TETEREV: I don't know. It doesn't matter.

TATYANA: You'll freeze to death in some ditch when you're drunk.

TETEREV: I never drink when I'm on the road. And what if I do freeze to death? Better to freeze on the go than rot sitting still.

TATYANA: Is it me you have in mind?

TETEREV (*jumping up in alarm*): Good Lord, no! How could you think such a thing! I'm not that cruel!

TATYANA (*smiling*): Don't let it upset you. I don't mind. I've become immune to pain. (*Bitterly.*) Everyone seems to know that. Nil, Polya, Yelena, Masha—they all behave

like rich people who eat their dainties without a thought for the feelings of the beggar who watches them.

TETEREV (*making a face and speaking through clenched teeth*): Why do you humiliate yourself so? You ought to have more self-respect.

TATYANA: Let's change the subject. (*Pause.*) Tell me something about yourself. You never talk about yourself. Why don't you?

TETEREV: It's a very big, but very uninteresting subject.

TATYANA: Tell me this: why have you chosen such a strange way of life? You strike me as being clever and gifted. What made you what you are?

TETEREV (*grinning*): The story would be too long and tiresome if I told it in my own words.

> I went in search of happiness,
> And came back naked, barefoot,
> Bereft of my habiliments,
> Of all my hopes and dreams. . . .

A simple explanation, but too pretty for me. I must add that in Russia a tramp or a drunk enjoys more ease of mind than a sober, honest fellow. (*Enter Pyotr and Nil.*) Only people as hard and sharp as swords can make their way in this world. Ah, Nil! Where have you been?

NIL: At the station. I just won a very good fight. That thick-skulled chief of ours—

PYOTR: You'll get the sack one of these days, I can see that.

NIL: I'll find myself another job.

TATYANA: Pyotr, Shishkin has quarrelled with Prokhorov and was ashamed to tell you himself.

PYOTR (*vexed*): Damn it all, that's the limit! How can I face Prokhorov now? And what's worse, I can't help any of the other fellows. Prokhorov will turn down anyone I suggest.

NIL: Don't be in such a hurry. You don't know who's in the right yet.

PYOTR: Oh, yes I do!

TATYANA: Shishkin was shocked to discover Prokhorov was down on the Jews.

NIL (*laughing*): God bless him!

PYOTR: You *would* find that noble in him! You, too, have no respect for other people's point of view.

NIL: Do you respect Jew-haters?

PYOTR: I wouldn't lay hands on anybody for his ideas, no matter what they were.

NIL: Well, I would.

TETEREV (*after calmly surveying both parties to the quarrel*): Go ahead and do it.

PYOTR: Who gives you the right?

NIL: Nobody. Rights aren't given, they're taken. A person's got to win rights for himself if he doesn't want to be crushed under a weight of obligations.

PYOTR: Oh, I say!

TATYANA (*petulantly*): Do stop quarrelling! These endless quarrels! Don't you ever get sick of them?

PYOTR (*restraining himself*): Forgive me, I won't do it again. But it's true, Shishkin has placed me in a confoundedly—

TATYANA: I know. He's stupid.

NIL: He's a decent chap. He won't let anyone step on his toes, but he's not afraid to step on theirs if necessary. It's a fine thing to know your own worth.

TATYANA: To be childish, you mean?

NIL: I don't. But it's a good thing, whatever you call it—childishness or anything else.

PYOTR: Absurd.

NIL: You think so? When a fellow throws away his last crust of bread because the hand that gave it to him is not to his liking?

PYOTR: He can't be very hungry if he does. Oh, of course you'll deny it. You're no better than he is—just as childish. You make a point of showing father how much you despise him. Why should you?

NIL: Why shouldn't I?

TETEREV: Decency demands the telling of white lies, my boy.

PYOTR: What's the good of it? Tell me that.

NIL: We'll never understand each other, you and I. Why should I explain to you? Everything your father says and does is repulsive to me.

PYOTR: Maybe it is to me, too, but I try not to show it, while you make a point of it. And he takes it out on us—on my sister and me.

TATYANA: Oh, stop it.

*(Nil glances at her and walks over to the table.)*

PYOTR: Does it upset you so much?

TATYANA: It bores me. The same thing over and over.

*(Polya, who enters with a jug of milk, is struck by the dreamy smile on Nil's face.)*

POLYA: Doesn't he look like a saint?

TETEREV: Why the blissful smile?

NIL: I was just recalling the tongue-lashing I gave the chief. Very amusing, this life of ours.

TETEREV *(in a deep bass voice)*: Amen!

PYOTR *(shrugging his shoulders)*: Are they born blind, these optimists, or what?

NIL: I don't know whether you'd call me an optimist or not, but I certainly do enjoy life. *(Gets up and paces the floor.)* It's a grand thing to be alive!

TETEREV: It is.

PYOTR: Two comedians—if you're not just making believe.

NIL: As for you—I don't understand you. Everybody knows you're in love, and that she loves you too. Isn't that enough to make you want to turn somersaults? To give you at least a little joy in life?

*(Polya looks proudly out from behind the samovar. Tatyana twists on the couch trying to catch a glimpse of Nil's face. Teterev smiles as he knocks the ashes out of his pipe.)*

PYOTR: You forget that, first of all, students aren't allowed to get married; secondly, I've got a big battle with my parents ahead; and thirdly—

NIL: Good Lord! Was ever anything more absurd? There's only one thing left for you, Pyotr: run off into the desert!

*(Polya smiles.)*

TATYANA: Don't try to be funny, Nil!

NIL: You're on the wrong track, Pyotr. Life's a great thing even if you're not in love. Even if you're driving a rattletrap locomotive on an autumn night, in the rain and the wind—or in winter, with the blizzard roaring, snow blotting out the world and closing you in. It's exhausting to sit in the cab on a night like that—exhausting and dangerous. And even so it has its charms. The only thing that has no charms is that honest people have to take orders from pigs—from thieves and imbeciles. But life wasn't made for them. They'll pass. They'll disappear like a sore on a healthy body. There's no such thing as an order of the day that's not subject to change.

PYOTR: We've heard these speeches of yours often enough. Wait and see what answer life has in store for you.

NIL: I'll make it give the answer I want. You can't frighten me. I know better than you that life is hard, that sometimes it's sickeningly cruel, that a fierce, unbridled force is pressing people down. I know all that

and don't like it. It gets my dander up. I don't want to accept things as they are. Life is a serious business, and it's out of shape. It will take all the strength and ability I have to help put it into shape. I also know I'm no hero—I'm just a strong honest fellow. And even so I say: just you wait—we'll win out in the end! And all my powers will go to satisfying my longing to change life—to throw myself into its very vortex—push it this way and that, mould it, help one thing, hinder another. That's what you call living! That's the joy of life!

TETEREV (*with a little laugh*): Therein lies the secret of learning; therein philosophy's lesson. And all other philosophy is claptrap!

YELENA (*from the doorway*): What's all this shouting and waving of arms about?

NIL (*rushing towards her*): Here's one who will understand me! I've just been singing a hymn to life. You tell them what a pleasure it is to be alive.

POLYA (*softly*): Oh it is, it is!

YELENA: Does anyone doubt it?

NIL (*to Polya*): My blessed little mouse!

YELENA: Come, now, no love-making in my presence.

PYOTR: God knows what's got into him. He must be drunk.

(*Tatyana throws her head back on the cushion and covers her face with her hands.*)

YELENA: Oh, you're about to have tea? And I came to ask you to have it with me. Well, then, I'll have it with you. It's lively here for a change. (*To Teterev.*) You're the only one, you wise old owl, who seems to be in the dumps. How's that?

TETEREV: I'm as gay as anybody else, only I like to be quiet when I'm gay and noisy when I'm sad.

NIL: Like all big, clever, sulky dogs.

YELENA: I've never seen you either gay or sad—only philosophical. What do you think, everybody?—what do you think, Tanya?—he's teaching me philosophy! Last night he read me a long lecture on the law of . . . of proximate cause. How does it go? Oh, dear, I've forgotten. Come, tell me again.

TETEREV (*smiling*): All life phenomena spring from—

YELENA: Hear that? Just see what clever things I'm learning! I don't suppose any of you ever heard that that law represents ("represents" is a philosophical term, mind you)—represents something like a . . . like a tooth, because it's got four roots. Am I right?

TETEREV: Who am I to call you wrong?

YELENA: Exactly. You just try it! The first root (or maybe it's not the first)—is primary cause. Existence—that's matter in form. Take me, for instance: I'm matter which has taken (not without cause) the form of a woman, but (and this time without any cause whatsoever) is deprived of being. Being is eternal, but matter in form appears on this earth and then—it's gone. Am I right?

TETEREV: We'll let it go at that.

YELENA: And besides this I know there are such things as causal relationships, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, but what they are I can't for the life of me remember. I'll probably get bald from all this wisdom. But the most profound problem posed by all this philosophy is: why in the world did you decide to teach me philosophy, Terenty Khrisanfovich?

TETEREV: Firstly, because I take pleasure in looking at you.

YELENA: Thank you for that. Don't bother about the "secondly"—it can't be interesting.

TETEREV: Secondly, because a person can't lie when he philosophizes, for philosophy is merely a figment of the imagination.

YELENA: Which means nothing to me. Oh, yes, Tanya! How do you feel? (*Without waiting for an answer.*) Pyotr . . . er . . . Pyotr Vasilyevich, what are you so displeased with?

PYOTR: Myself.

NIL: And everybody else?

YELENA: I feel a sudden urge to sing. What a pity today's Saturday and mass isn't over yet! (*Enter Bessemenov and Akulina Ivanovna.*) Ah, here come the pious folk! Good evening.

BESSEMENOV (*dryly*): Good evening.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*in the same tone*): Good evening, young lady. But we've exchanged greetings once today.

YELENA: So we have. I had forgotten. Er . . . how was church? Was it hot?

BESSEMENOV: We don't go to church to take the temperature.

YELENA (*embarrassed*): I see. But I—that wasn't what I meant. I meant to ask if there were many people there.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: We didn't count them, young lady.

POLYA (*to Bessemenov*): Will you have tea?

BESSEMENOV: First we'll have supper. Go and get something ready, mother. (*Akulina Ivanovna goes out with a sniff. Silence. Tatyana gets up and Yelena helps her over to the table. Nil takes Tatyana's place on the couch. Pyotr walks up and down. Teterev, who is sitting at the piano, watches them all with a smile on his face. Polya is at the samovar. Bessemenov sits on the trunk in the corner.*) Surprising how thievish folk have become! A while back, when mother and I were going to church, I laid a board down at the gate—over the mud, that is. When we come back, the board's gone. Some thief stole it. Corruption has got into the people. (*Pause.*) There was less petty thieving back in the old days—more high-

way robbery, on account the people were on a bigger scale. They wouldn't put a smudge on their souls for anything as petty as a board. (*The sound of singing and the playing of an accordion comes from out in the street.*) Hear that? Singing. The eve of the Sabbath, and they're singing. (*The singing draws nearer. It is part-singing.*) Must be workmen. Went to the pub soon's they knocked off, drank up all their pay, and now they're stretching their gullets. (*The singers have reached the house. Nil leans on the window-sill and looks out.*) They'll go on living that way another year—two at the most, and all's over. Tramps they'll be, or petty thieves.

NIL: Perchikhin, it seems—

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*at the door*): Supper's ready, father.

BESSEMENOV (*getting up*): Perchikhin. Another one of those good-for-nothings. (*Goes out.*)

YELENA (*following him with her eye*): Wouldn't it be better to have tea at my place?

NIL: Very amusing, your talk with the old folk.

YELENA: I—he makes me feel uncomfortable. He doesn't like me, and that's very unpleasant—even hurtful. Why shouldn't he like me?

PYOTR: He's good enough at heart, but he's too proud.

NIL: And the least bit greedy and cantankerous.

POLYA: Sh. You shouldn't say such things about a man behind his back. That's not nice.

NIL: It's not nice to be greedy.

TATYANA (*dryly*): Let's drop the subject. Father may come in any minute. He hasn't scolded anyone for the last three days. He's been trying to be pleasant.

PYOTR: It hasn't been easy, you can be sure.

TATYANA: We ought to appreciate it. He's old. It isn't his fault if he was born years before we were and doesn't see things as we do. (*With irritation.*) How cruel people

are! How rude and heartless we are to each other! We're taught to love one another, to be meek and kind—

NIL (*copying her tone*): So that others can climb up on our backs and ride to town on us.

(*Yelena laughs. Polya and Teterev smile. Pyotr goes over to Nil as if to say something to him. Tatyana shakes her head reproachfully.*)

BESSEMENOV (*casting a hostile glance at Yelena as he comes in*): Polya, your father's in the kitchen. Go and tell him to ... er ... come back another time, when he's ... er ... sober. Tell him to go home.

(*Polya goes out, Nil follows her.*)

BESSEMENOV (*to Nil*): You go too. Have a look at your future ... er.... (*Cuts himself short and sits down at the table.*) Why the silence? I notice soon's I come into the room, everybody goes mum.

TATYANA: We don't talk much when you're not here either.

BESSEMENOV (*scowling at Yelena*): What were you laughing at?

YELENA: Nothing in particular. Nil—

BESSEMENOV: Nil! He's at the bottom of everything. I could tell that without your saying so.

TATYANA: Shall I pour you out some tea?

BESSEMENOV: Go ahead.

YELENA: Here, Tanya, I'll do it.

BESSEMENOV: Don't trouble yourself. My daughter will do it, thank you.

PYOTR: I don't see what difference it makes who does it. Tatyana's not feeling well.

BESSEMENOV: I'm not asking you your opinion on this matter. If strangers mean more to you than your own folk—

PYOTR: Father! Aren't you ashamed?

TATYANA: There you go! Pyotr, can't you hold your tongue?

YELENA (*forcing a smile*): Is it worth—?

(*The door is flung wide open and in comes Perchikhin, slightly tipsy.*)

PERCHIKHIN: Vasily Vasilyevich! Here I am! Don't think you can get rid of me by walking out of the kitchen!

BESSEMENOV (*without looking at him*): Well, sit down, once you're here. Have some tea.

PERCHIKHIN: It's not tea I want. Drink it yourself. I've come to have a talk with you.

BESSEMENOV: Talk? Nonsense!

PERCHIKHIN: Nonsense, eh? (*Laughs.*) You're a funny one! (*Nil comes in and stands leaning against the sideboard glaring at Bessemenov.*) Four days I been making up my mind to come and have a talk with you, and—well, here I am!

BESSEMENOV: Oh, drop it!

PERCHIKHIN: No, I won't! You're a clever man, Vasily Vasilyevich; you're a rich man, but it's—it's your conscience I've come to talk to.

PYOTR (*going over to Nil and speaking in an undertone*): What did you let him in here for?

NIL: Leave him alone. It's none of your business.

PYOTR: You're always stirring up trouble.

PERCHIKHIN (*drowning out Pyotr*): You're an old man, too, Vasily Vasilyevich. Just think of all the years I've known you!

BESSEMENOV (*angrily*): What do you want of me?

PERCHIKHIN: Here's what: tell me this, what did you put me out of your house for? I've thought and thought and can't make no sense out of it. Tell me why, brother. I've come to you without any bad feelings—with love in my heart.

BESSEMENOV: And fog in your head!

TATYANA: Pyotr, help me up—no, call Polya. (*Pyotr goes out.*)

PERCHIKHIN: Take Polya, now. That sweet little girl of mine, that pretty little bird. Is it on her account you put me out? Because she took Tatyana's beau away from her?

TATYANA: How preposterous! How degrading!

BESSEMENOV (*slowly getting up*): Watch out, Perchikhin! Say that again and I'll—

YELENA (*to Nil, under her breath*): Take him out. There'll be trouble.

NIL: I don't want to.

PERCHIKHIN: You won't put me out a second time, Vasily Vasilyevich! There'll be no reason to. Polya, she's a good girl and I love her, but she hadn't ought to have done it—no, brother, she hadn't ought to. It's not right to take what belongs to somebody else.

TATYANA: Yelena, help me to my room. (*Yelena takes her arm. As they pass Nil, Tatyana says softly*): You ought to be ashamed! Take him out!

BESSEMENOV (*restraining himself with an effort*): Hold your tongue, Perchikhin. Sit down and hold your tongue, and if you can't, get out! (*Enter Polya followed by Pyotr.*)

PYOTR (*to Polya*): Wait, don't let it upset you so.

POLYA: Vasily Vasilyevich! Why did you put my father out the last time he was here?

(*Bessemenov looks at her with stern disapproval, then at everyone else in turn.*)

PERCHIKHIN (*shaking his finger*): Sh-h, daughter! Not a word! You'd ought to understand. Tatyana took poison, didn't she? What for?... See? I don't spare nobody, Vasily Vasilyevich—judge them all equal, as they deserve. I don't make no difference—

POLYA: Wait, father—

PYOTR: Polya, can't you—?

NIL: You keep out of it!

BESSEMENOV: As for you, Polya, you're a bold and insolent—

PERCHIKHIN: Her? Oh, no, she's—

BESSEMENOV: Shut up! I seem to have lost my bearings. Whose house is this anyway? Who's the master here? Who's to say what's right and what's wrong?

PERCHIKHIN: I am. And I'll tell each of you in turn. First of all, it's wrong to take what belongs to somebody else. Secondly, once you've taken it, give it back.

PYOTR (*to Perchikhin*): Stop chirping and come into my room a minute.

PERCHIKHIN: I don't like you, Pyotr! You're a hollow fellow. And too proud. And you don't know nothing, neither. What's sewerage, eh? There you are! I had to find out from somebody else. (*Pyotr pulls him by the sleeve.*) Hands off! Don't touch me!

NIL (*to Pyotr*): Don't touch him.

BESSEMENOV (*to Nil*): What are you here for? To sick the dog on?

NIL: I want to know what it's all about. What did Perchikhin do? Why did you turn him out? And what has Polya got to do with it?

BESSEMENOV: Are you cross-examining me?

NIL: What if I am? You're only a human being like myself.

BESSEMENOV (*furious*): Like you? You're not a human being, you're . . . you're poison! You're a cur!

PERCHIKHIN: Sh-h! Let's talk quiet-like, friendly-like—

BESSEMENOV (*to Polya*): And you, you sly hussy—

NIL (*through his teeth*): Less noise, you!

BESSEMENOV: What's that? Get out, you ingrate! Turning on me who's fed you all these years by the sweat of my brow—

TATYANA (*from inside her room*): Papa! Don't!

PYOTR (*to Nil*): Have you got what you wanted? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

POLYA (*quietly*): Don't you dare shout at me. I'm no slave of yours. Not everybody will take your insults. Tell me what you turned my father out of the house for.

NIL (*calmly*): Tell me, too. This is no insane asylum. People here are expected to answer for what they do.

BESSEMENOV (*more quietly, taking himself in hand*): Get out, Nil. Get out before something happens. Don't forget—I'm the one as fed you. I'm the one as brought you up.

NIL: Will you ever stop throwing that in my teeth? I'll pay you for all I've eaten.

BESSEMENOV: It's my soul you've eaten, you ingrate!

POLYA (*taking Nil's hand*): Let's get out of here.

BESSEMENOV: That's it, crawl away like the snake you are. You're the one that's to blame. It's all on account of you. You stung my daughter. And now him. It's because of you my daughter....

PERCHIKHIN: Vasily Vasilyevich! Soft there! Soft!

TATYANA (*calling out*): That's not true, father! Pyotr, can't you do something? (*Appears in the doorway and staggers into the centre of the room with outstretched arms.*) This is horrible! Good God! Terenty Khrisanfovich! Tell them ... tell them.... Nil! Polya! For God's sake, go away! Go away! Why do you allow it?

(*The room is full of confused movement. Teterev, grinning, gets up slowly. Bessemenov retreats before his daughter. Pyotr seizes her by the arm and looks about him distractedly.*)

POLYA: Come along.

NIL: Very well. (*To Bessemenov.*) We're going. I'm sorry it had to end like this.

BESSEMENOV: Get out! And take her with you!

NIL: I won't come back, you know.

POLYA (*loudly, in a trembling voice*): To accuse me of such a thing! To blame me for Tatyana! As if it were my fault! How shameful!

BESSEMENOV (*infuriated*): Well, go if you're going!

NIL: Not so loud, if you please.

PERCHIKHIN: Don't be angry, children. We must be meek.

POLYA: Good-bye. Come, father.

NIL (*to Perchikhin*): Come along.

PERCHIKHIN: I'm not going with you. I want to stand on my own two feet. Alone. Terenty, I stand alone! I've done nobody no harm.

TETEREV: Come into my room.

POLYA: Come along before they put you out again.

PERCHIKHIN: No, I'm not coming. Terenty, I don't belong with them. I understand—

PYOTR (*to Nil*): For God's sake, go!

NIL (*to Pyotr*): A fine one you turned out to be!

POLYA (*to Nil*): Come along, come along! (*They go out.*)

BESSEMENOV (*shouting after them*): You'll come back—come crawling back!

PYOTR: Drop it, father.

TATYANA: Poor father! Don't shout, father.

BESSEMENOV: Just wait! We'll see!

PERCHIKHIN: Well, now they've gone, thank goodness. Let them.

BESSEMENOV: I'd like to tell them what I think of them, the blood-suckers! Fed them, clothed them.... (*To Perchikhin.*) And you, you old fool! Had to come and have your say, didn't you? What are you after? What is it, I say?

PYOTR: Don't start all over again, father.

PERCHIKHIN: Vasily Vasilyevich! Don't shout at me. Why, I think the world of you, you funny man! I'm foolish, it's true, but I understand a thing or two.

BESSEMENOV (*sinking down on the sofa*): That's more than I do. I don't understand a thing. What happened? One of them left—as sudden as a fire springs up in the dead of night. Says he'll never come back. Just like that. But I don't believe him.

TETEREV (*to Perchikhin*): What are you here for?

PERCHIKHIN: To get things plain. It's a simple way I have of looking at things: two and two makes four and that's that. She's my daughter, isn't she? Good. That means she's obliged.... (*He suddenly falls silent*). It's a bad father I've been to her, so she's not obliged. Let her live her life as she sees fit. But I feel sorry for Tatyana. I feel sorry for you, Tatyana. I feel sorry for all of you. (*Sighs.*) Truth to tell, you're a set of fools.

BESSEMENOV: Hold your tongue!

PYOTR: Tatyana, has Yelena Nikolayevna gone?

YELENA (*from Tatyana's room*): No, I'm here. I'm mixing medicines.

BESSEMENOV: My head's in a whirl. Can't make anything out of it. Can Nil really have gone? For good?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*enters in agitation*): What's happened? Nil and Polya are out in the kitchen ... I was in the shed....

BESSEMENOV: Have they gone?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: No, they're waiting for Perchikhin. Polya says ... tell father, she says, and her lips are trembling.... Nil's growling like an angry dog. What's happened?

BESSEMENOV (*getting up*): Now I'll go and tell them!

PYOTR: Don't, father. Stay here.

TATYANA: Father, please don't!

BESSEMENOV: Don't what?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: What is it? What's happened?

BESSEMENOV: Nil's leaving. For good.

PYOTR: What of it? Good riddance. What do you need

him for? He's getting married. He wants to have his own family.

BESSEMENOV: His own? What am I, a stranger to him?

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Don't be so upset, father. Forget him, let him go. We've got our own children to think of. You still here, Perchikhin? They're waiting for you.

PERCHIKHIN: Their way's not my way.

BESSEMENOV: It's not his going I mind. Let him go if he wants to. It's the way he went. Did you see the look he gave me?

(*Yelena comes out of Tatyana's room.*)

TETEREV (*taking Perchikhin by the arm and leading him to the door*): We'll have a glass of something, you and me.

PERCHIKHIN: That's talking sense now!

(*They go out.*)

BESSEMENOV: I knew he'd leave us some day, but not like this. And her! The way she shouted! That beggar girl! Oh, no, I've got to give them a piece of my—

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Let them be, father! They're not our sort! Why should you bother with them? If they want to go, let them.

YELENA (*softly to Pyotr*): Come with me.

TATYANA (*to Yelena*): Me too. Take me with you.

YELENA: Of course. Come along.

BESSEMENOV (*hearing her invitation*): Where to?

YELENA: Upstairs.

BESSEMENOV: Who are you inviting? Pyotr?

YELENA: And Tatyana.

BESSEMENOV: Tatyana don't count, and Pyotr's not to go.

PYOTR: But, father, I'm not a child. I'll go or not, as I—

BESSEMENOV: You're not to go.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Give in to your father, Pyotr. Give in, that's a good boy.

YELENA (*indignant*): I beg your pardon, Vasily Vasilyevich, but—

BESSEMENOV: No, it's me as begs yours—even if you do happen to be educated young folk, even if you do happen to have lost all sense of decency, all respect for your elders—

TATYANA (*hysterically*): Father! Stop it!

BESSEMENOV: Hold your tongue! If you can't manage your own affairs, be so good as to hold your tongue at least. Wait, where are you going?

(*Yelena makes for the door.*)

PYOTR (*rushes after her and seizes her hand*): Just a minute. We ought to have it out—now—once and for all!

BESSEMENOV: You ought to hear me out. Be good enough to listen to me for once. Give me a chance to see what's what. (*Perchikhin comes in beaming, followed by Teterev, who is also smiling. They halt in the doorway and exchange glances. Perchikhin winks in Bessemenov's direction and gives a disparaging wave of his hand.*) Everybody running off like this without so much as a by-your-leave! Very hurtful and wanton! There's no place for you to go, Pyotr. Who do you think you are? What can you do? How can you make a living? (*Akulina Ivanovna whimpers softly. Pyotr, Yelena and Tatyana form a solid little group facing Bessemenov, but on his words*: "There's no place for you to go," *Tatyana leaves them and goes over to the table where her mother is standing. Perchikhin makes signs to Teterev—shakes his head and flaps his arms as if scaring up a flock of birds.*) I have a right to ask. You're still young and foolish. For fifty-eight years I've been working myself to the bone for the sake of my children—

PYOTR: I've heard all that before, father. A hundred times.

BESSEMENOV: Hold your tongue!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Ah, Pyotr, Pyotr!

TATYANA: Hush, mother, you don't understand.

(*Akulina Ivanovna shakes her head.*)

BESSEMENOV: Not a word! What can you tell us? What can you teach us? Not one thing!

PYOTR: I can't stand much more of this, father. What do you want of me?

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*suddenly speaking in a loud voice*): Wait! I, too, have feelings; I, too, have a right to speak! Think what you're doing, son! Have you asked us?

TATYANA: This is ghastly. Like a blunt saw. (*To her mother.*) You're hacking me to pieces—body and soul.

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Your mother—a blunt saw! Your mother!

BESSEMENOV: Wait, old woman. Let him speak.

YELENA (*to Pyotr*): I've had enough. I'm going.

PYOTR: Just a minute, for God's sake! Everything will be clear in a minute!

YELENA: It's a mad-house, a—

TETEREV: Go away, Yelena Nikolayevna! To hell with them—the whole lot of them!

BESSEMENOV: As for you, my fine gentleman—as for you—

TATYANA: Will it never end? Go away, Pyotr!

PYOTR (*almost shrieking*): Father! Mother! Look! This is the woman I'm going to marry!

(*Silence. All eyes are on Pyotr. Akulina Ivanovna puts her hand over her mouth and looks in horror at her husband. Bessemenov falls backward as if pushed and drops his head on his chest. Tatyana gives a deep sigh and walks slowly towards the piano, her hands hanging limply at her sides.*)

TETEREV (*under his breath*): He chose the right moment.

PERCHIKHIN (*stepping forward*): So there you are! All the birdies flying off! Good for you, young folk. Fly out of your cages like the birds on Lady Day!

YELENA (*snatching her hand out of Pyotr's*): Let me go! I can't bear it!

PYOTR: (*murmuring*): Everything's clear now—once and for all!

BESSEMENOV (*bowing to his son*): Thank you, son, for such good tidings.

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*tearfully*): You're ruined, Pyotr! As if she was your equal!

PERCHIKHIN: Her? Pyotr's? Come, come, old woman! What's he worth?

BESSEMENOV (*slowly to Yelena*): Thank you, young lady. So now he's done for. He was to go on studying, and now? Very slick of you. But I saw it coming. (*Viciously.*) Congratulations on your catch! But you'll not have my blessing, Pyotr! So you caught him, did you? Crept up on him and seized him, you damned she-cat!

YELENA: How dare you!

PYOTR: Father! Have you gone mad?

YELENA: You're right! I took him away from you! Yes, I did! I was the one to propose, hear that, you old screech-owl? I'm the one snatched him away from you! Out of pity for him. You'd have tortured him to death! You're not human beings, you're a sort of rust that eats people up! Your love would have been his ruin. You think—oh, I know what you think!—you think I did this for my own sake. Well, think what you like. How I hate you!

TATYANA: Yelena! What are you saying?

PYOTR: Yelena! Let's go!

YELENA: Maybe I'll never marry him—you'd be glad, wouldn't you? It's very likely I won't. Don't lose hope. I'll just live with him—without any wedding-ring. But

I won't give him to you, you can be sure of that! I'll never let you torture him again. He'll never come back to you—never! never!

TETEREV: Vivat, young lady! Vivat!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Merciful heavens! What's happening, father? What is it?

PYOTR (*pushing Yelena towards the door*): Go. Do go. Hurry.

(*Yelena goes out and draws Pyotr after her.*)

BESSEMENOV (*glancing about helplessly*): How's that? (*In a sudden burst of fury.*) Call the police! (*Stamping his feet.*) I'll put her out! This very day! The slut!

TATYANA: Father! Take yourself in hand!

PERCHIKHIN (*astounded, uncomprehending*): Vasily Vasilyevich! What's the matter? What're you shouting for? You'd ought to be glad.

TATYANA (*going over to her father*): Listen—

BESSEMENOV: You? You still here? Why don't you go too? Go ahead! Nowhere to go? Nobody to go with? Missed your chance, eh?

(*Tatyana staggers back, then turns and goes quickly over to the piano. Akulina Ivanovna—piteous, distracted—rushes over to her.*)

PERCHIKHIN: Vasily Vasilyevich, think what you're saying! Pyotr won't go on studying now—why should he? (*Bessemenov gazes dully at Perchikhin and shakes his head.*) He's got enough money to live on—you've saved it up. His wife's a very daisy, and here you are shouting and carrying on! What's the sense of it, you funny old fellow?

(*Teterev bursts out laughing.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*wailing*): They've all gone and left us! All gone away!.

BESSEMENOV (*glancing round*): Hush, mother. They'll come back. They haven't the guts to go away. Where'll they go? (*To Teterev.*) What are you grinning at, you pestilence? I'll put you out too! So's there's not a smell of you left on the premises this time tomorrow! You and the likes of you!

PERCHIKHIN: Vasily Vasilyevich!

BESSEMENOV: You get out too, you miserable tramp!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: Tanya! Tanechka! My blessed daughter! My poor unfortunate! What are we coming to?

BESSEMENOV: You knew what was happening, daughter! You knew it all the time and never said a word! A conspiracy against your father, eh? (*Suddenly a look of fright comes over his face.*) What if he never leaves her—that skirt! A whore to wife! My son! Oh, there's a curse on the lot of you, wretched, immoral creatures that you are!

TATYANA: Stop it, father! Don't make me hate you!

AKULINA IVANOVNA: My poor darling! My poor unfortunate! They've wore you out. They've wore us all out, the Lord only knows why!

BESSEMENOV: Who has? It's all that rascal of a Nil. He's the one spoiled our son! He's the one hurt our daughter! (*Catching sight of Teterev standing at the sideboard.*) What're you doing here, you sot? Get out, I say!

PERCHIKHIN: Vasily Vasilyevich! What's *he* done? Good Lord, the old man's gone clean off his chump!

TETEREV (*serenely*): Save your wind, old man! You've got no power to stop the storm that's breaking over you. But have no fear, your son will come back.

BESSEMENOV (*quickly*): How do you know?

TETEREV: He won't leave you for long. He raised himself ever so slightly for the time being. He got pulled up. But he'll sink back again. As soon as you're dead he'll make over this sty of yours, move the furniture about

and go on living as you've been living—calm, cosy and respectable.

PERCHIKHIN (*to Bessemenov*): See? You flew off the handle for no good reason, foolish man! He wishes you well, Terenty does, wants to comfort you, and you shout at him! He's a wise fellow, Terenty is.

TETEREV: He'll just rearrange the furniture and go on living in the same old way, convinced he's done his duty before God and man. He was made in your image and likeness.

PERCHIKHIN: As like as two peas!

TETEREV: Exactly alike—as big a coward, as big a fool.

PERCHIKHIN (*to Teterev*): Wait, what's that you're saying?

BESSEMENOV: No insults, if you please. How dare you?

TETEREV: And in due time he'll be just as greedy, just as hard-hearted, and just as self-complacent. (*Perchikhin stares wonderingly at Teterev, trying to understand whether he's comforting or upbraiding the old man. Bessemenov, too, is nonplussed, but he takes an interest in what Teterev is saying.*) And he'll be just as miserable in the end as you are now. Life is moving ahead, old man, and whoever is unable to keep up with it will find himself left behind—alone.

PERCHIKHIN: Hear that? In other words, everything is as it ought to be, and here you are, bellowing and snorting!

BESSEMENOV: Can't you keep out of it?

TETEREV: And in just the same way there'll be no pity shown him, that miserable son of yours. He'll be asked straight to his face, as I'm asking you now: "What have you lived for? What good have you ever done?" And, like you, he'll be unable to answer.

BESSEMENOV: Very pretty it sounds when you say it—you always could put things pretty. But search your own

soul and see what's there! I'll never put any faith in what *you* say! And . . . well . . . I'm giving you notice. Clear out of here. I've taken enough from you. A lot of this has been your doing. You've brought enough harm on my house.

TETEREV: If only it had been me! Unfortunately it wasn't. (*Goes out.*)

BESSEMENOV (*tossing back his head*): I'll go on standing it. I'll bide my time. I've been standing it all these years—I guess I can stand it a little longer. (*Goes into his room.*)

AKULINA IVANOVNA (*running after her husband*): Father! My poor old man! Why have our children done this to us? What have we done to deserve it? (*They go into their room. Perchikhin stands in the middle of the room blinking his eyes. Tatyana, who is sitting on the piano stool, gazes wildly about her. The sound of muffled voices comes from Bessemenov's room.*)

PERCHIKHIN: Tanya! Tanechka! (*Tatyana does not so much as look at him.*) Tanya! What's the reason for it—the running away, the crying—what's the reason, eh? (*Looks at Tatyana and sighs.*) Queer birds! (*Glances at the door of Bessemenov's room, then goes out into the hall shaking his head.*) Guess I'll go and sit with Terenty a spell. Queer birds!

(*Slowly Tatyana collapses, dropping her arms on the keyboard, her head on her arms. There is the discordant sound of many keys striking at once. Gradually it dies out.*)

CURTAIN

DEDICATED
TO KONSTANTIN PETROVICH
PYATNITSKY

# THE LOWER DEPTHS

## CHARACTERS

MIKHAIL IVANOVICH KOSTYLYOV, *54 years old, owner of a lodging-house*

VASILISA KARPOVNA, *26 years old, his wife*

NATASHA, *20 years old, her sister*

ABRAM MEDVEDEV, *50 years old, their uncle, a policeman*

VASYA PEPEL, *28 years old*

ANDREI KLESHCH, *40 years old, a locksmith*

ANNA, *30 years old, his wife*

NASTYA, *24 years old, a streetwalker*

KVASHNYA, *40 years old, a woman who peddles dumplings*

BUBNOV, *45 years old, a hatter*

THE BARON, *33 years old*

SATIN<br>THE ACTOR } *Approximately the same age, about 40*

LUKA, *60 years old, a pilgrim*

ALYOSHKA, *20 years old, a cobbler*

KRIVOI ZOB<br>THE TATAR } *Dock hands*

## ACT I

*A cellar resembling a cave. The heavy vaulted ceiling is smoke-blackened and in places the plaster has fallen off. Light descends from a square window upstage right. A thin partition turns the right corner of the stage into a room for Pepel. Near the door of this room is Bubnov's bunk. A large Russian stove occupies the upper left corner. A door in the stone wall to the left leads to the kitchen where Kvashnya, the Baron, and Nastya live. A wide bed enclosed by dirty cotton hangings stands against the wall between the stove and this door. Bunks are built against all the walls. Downstage left stands an upturned log to which are attached a vice and an anvil. Behind the anvil on a similar, but lower log, sits Kleshch, trying keys in an old lock. The floor about him is cluttered with rings of miscellaneous keys, a battered tin samovar, a hammer and files, etc. The centre of the lodging is occupied by a large table, two benches and a stool, all of them dirty and unpainted. Kvashnya is busy at a samovar standing on the table, the Baron is chewing a piece of black bread, and Nastya is sitting with her elbows on the table, poring over a dog-eared novel. Anna can be heard coughing*

*behind the curtains of the bed. Bubnov is sitting on his bunk with a hat block between his knees, calculating how to cut a cap out of strips of cloth ripped from an old pair of trousers. Near him lie bits of rags and oilcloth and pieces of cardboard for making the visors of caps. Satin, who has just awakened, is lying on his bunk and snarling. The Actor is coughing and moving about on top of the stove,* out of sight of the audience. It is a morning in early spring.*

BARON: What next?

KVASHNYA: Oh no, you don't, my darling, says I. Keep your distance, says I. I've already had my try at that sort of thing, and you couldn't drag me to the altar again for a hundred baked crawfish, says I.

BUBNOV (*to Satin*): What're you grunting about?

(*Satin snarls again.*)

KVASHNYA: Me, a free woman as is her own boss, to go and have herself writ into somebody else's passport? says I. That I should become the slave of some man? Not on your life! Oh no! Not if he was the King of America himself!

KLESHCH: That's a lie!

KVASHNYA: What's that?

KLESHCH: That's a lie. You'll marry Abram!

BARON (*snatching Nastya's book and reading the title*): "Fatal Love." (*Laughs.*)

NASTYA (*reaching for the book*): Here, give it back! Come on! No fooling!

(*The Baron teases her by waving the book in the air.*)

* A Russian stove is so constructed that the space above the oven is large enough to serve as a bed.—*Tr.*

KVASHNYA (*to Kleshch*): You're a red-headed old goat, that's what you are! A lie! How dare you insult me like that!

BARON (*striking Nastya over the head with the book*): You're a fool, Nastya!

NASTYA (*snatching the book away*): Give it to me!

KLESHCH: What a fine lady! But you'll marry Abram all right! That's all you're waiting for!

KVASHNYA: Oh yes, of course! What else? The way you've rode your wife to death!

KLESHCH: Shut up, you bitch! That's none of your business!

KVASHNYA: O-ho! Don't like to hear the truth, eh?

BARON: There they go! Nastya, where are you?

NASTYA (*without raising her head*): Oh, get out!

ANNA (*peering out from behind the curtains*): The day's begun! For God's sake, don't shout. Don't quarrel!

KLESHCH: Whining again!

ANNA: Every blessed day! You might let a person at least die in peace!

BUBNOV: Can't scare death off with a little noise.

KVASHNYA (*going over to Anna*): How'd you ever live with that fiend, my poor dearie?

ANNA: Leave me alone. Go away.

KVASHNYA: Hm. There's a martyr for you! Any easier in your chest today?

BARON: Kvashnya! Time to go to market!

KVASHNYA: Just a minute! (*To Anna.*) Wouldn't you like some nice hot dumplings?

ANNA: No, thanks. Why should I bother to eat?

KVASHNYA: You just try them. Good and hot—they'll loosen up your cough. I'll leave them here in this bowl so's you can help yourself when you feel like it. Come on, me lord! (*To Kleshch.*) Br-r-r! You hobgoblin!

(*Goes into the kitchen.*)

ANNA (*coughing*): Oh, Lord!

BARON (*slyly giving Nastya's head a push*): Drop it, you little fool!

NASTYA (*muttering*): Get out! I'm not in your way, am I?

(*Baron whistles a tune as he goes out on the heels of Kvashnya.*)

SATIN (*raising himself on his bed*): Who gave me a beating last night?

BUBNOV: What difference does it make to you?

SATIN: None, I suppose. But what did they give me a beating for?

BUBNOV: Were you in a card game?

SATIN: I was.

BUBNOV: That explains the beating.

SATIN: The scoundrels!

ACTOR (*poking his head over the edge of the stove*): They'll beat you to death one of these days.

SATIN: You're an ass.

ACTOR: Why?

SATIN: You can't kill a person twice.

ACTOR (*after a pause*): Why not? I don't see why not.

KLESHCH (*to Actor*): Get down off that stove and tidy up. Afraid of spoiling your hands?

ACTOR: That's none of your business.

KLESHCH: Wait till Vasilisa comes in. She'll show you whose business it is!

ACTOR: To hell with Vasilisa! It's the Baron's turn to tidy up today. Baron!

BARON (*entering from the kitchen*): I haven't time to tidy up. I'm going to market with Kvashnya.

ACTOR: What do I care? You can go to jail for all I care, but it's your turn to sweep the floor. I'm not doing another man's job for him.

BARON: To hell with you! Nastya will sweep the floor. Hey there, "fatal love"! Wake up! (*Snatches the book out of her hands.*)

NASTYA (*getting up*): What do you want? Give it back! Funny, aren't you? And you call yourself a gentleman!

BARON (*handing back the book*): Sweep the floor for me, Nastya. That's a good girl.

NASTYA (*going into the kitchen*): Oh, won't I just! I'd love to!

KVASHNYA (*at the kitchen door, to the Baron*): Come on! They'll manage here without your help. Hey, there, Actor! It's you they're asking, so be so kind. It won't break your back.

ACTOR: Humph! Always me. I don't see why—

BARON (*entering from the kitchen with a wooden yoke on his shoulders from which are suspended two baskets containing crocks covered with dirty rags*): Heavier than usual today.

SATIN: Was it worth getting yourself born a Baron?

KVASHNYA (*to the Actor*): You begin that sweeping, now!

(*She makes for the passage, letting the Baron go out first.*)

ACTOR (*climbing down off the stove*): It's harmful for me to inhale dust. (*Proudly.*) My organism is poisoned with alcohol. (*He becomes meditative, sinking down on one of the bunks.*)

SATIN: Organism.... Organon....

ANNA: Andrei Mitrich....

KLESHCH: Now, what do you want?

ANNA: Kvashnya left me some dumplings. Take them and eat them.

KLESHCH (*going over to her*): What about you? Don't you want them?

ANNA: No. Why should I eat? But you're a working man. You need food.

KLESHCH: Are you afraid? Don't be afraid. You can't tell, maybe—

ANNA: Go ahead and eat them. I'm feeling bad. I guess it'll be soon now.

KLESHCH (*going out*): Don't fret. Maybe you'll get better. It sometimes happens. (*Goes into the kitchen.*)

ACTOR (*loudly, as though he had suddenly awakened*): Yesterday the doctor in the clinic said to me: Your organism, he said, is completely poisoned with alcohol.

SATIN (*smiling*): Organon....

ACTOR (*insisting*): Not organon. Or-gan-ism.

SATIN: Sicambri!

ACTOR (*waving his hand at him*): Idiocy! But I'm talking serious. Yes, I am! If your organism is poisoned, it must be harmful to sweep the floor, to breathe that dust.

SATIN: Macrobiotics! Hah!

BUBNOV: What's that you're garbling?

SATIN: Words. Then there's that: trans-scen-dep-tal.

BUBNOV: What does that mean?

SATIN: Don't know. Forgot.

BUBNOV: Then what do you say it for?

SATIN: Just for fun. I'm sick of all the words people use, brother. I'm sick of all our words! I've heard them all a thousand times!

ACTOR: In "Hamlet" they say, "Words, words, words!" A wonderful play! I acted the part of the grave-digger.

KLESHCH (*entering from the kitchen*): When are you going to start acting the part of the floor-sweep?

ACTOR: Mind your own business! (*Striking his breast.*) "Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered!"

(*At some distance off stage is heard a confusion of voices, cries, police whistles. Kleshch sits down to work, making a rasping noise with his file.*)

SATIN: I love odd, incomprehensible words. When I was a boy working in a telegraph office I did a lot of reading.

BUBNOV: Were you a telegraph operator, too?

SATIN: I was. (*Gives a little laugh.*) There are some fine books, and a great many curious words. I was once a well-educated man, did you know that?

BUBNOV: Heard it a hundred times. What if you were? A lot of difference it makes now! Take me, for instance. I was a furrier once. Had my own shop. My hands used to be all yellow from dyeing the fur—hands and arms, right up to the elbow. I thought they'd stay that way to the day of my death. I thought I'd die with those yellow arms, and now look at them. Just plain dirty. Humph!

SATIN: Well, what of it?

BUBNOV: Nothing. That's all.

SATIN: Then what was the point of your speech?

BUBNOV: There wasn't any. Just an idea. It turns out that no matter how carefully you paint the outside, it all rubs off. It all rubs off. Humph!

SATIN: Oh, how my bones ache!

ACTOR (*sits hugging his knees*): Education is nothing; it's talent that counts. I once knew an actor who could only read out his role by syllables, but when he acted, the theatre rocked and roared with the rapture of his audience.

SATIN: Bubnov, lend me five kopeks!

BUBNOV: I've only got two.

ACTOR: I'm telling you it's talent you need to be an actor. And talent means believing in yourself, in your ability.

SATIN: Give me five kopeks and I'll believe you're a genius, a hero, a crocodile, a police officer! Kleshch, give me five kopeks!

KLESHCH: Go to the devil! Too many like you around.

SATIN: No swearing, if you please. Don't I know you haven't got a kopek to your name?

ANNA: Andrei Mitrich . . . I can't breathe . . . so stuffy. . . .

KLESHCH: What do you expect me to do about it?

BUBNOV: Open the door into the passage.

KLESHCH: Oh yes, of course. You up there on your bed and me down here on the floor. Change places with me and you can open the door. I've got a cold as it is.

BUBNOV (*calmly*): It's not me that wants the door open. It's your wife that's asking.

KLESHCH (*sullenly*): There are plenty of things a person can ask for.

SATIN: How my head's humming! Why should people lam each other over the bean?

BUBNOV: Not only over the bean, but over the whole remaining territory of the body. (*Getting up.*) I'm going out to buy some thread. Wonder what's keeping our landlord and his wife so long today? Maybe they've kicked the bucket. (*Goes out.*)

(*Anna coughs. Satin lies motionless with his hands under his head.*)

ACTOR (*glancing miserably about him, goes over to Anna*): Feeling bad?

ANNA: It's so stuffy.

ACTOR: I'll take you out into the passage if you like. Come, get up. (*He helps her rise, throws some rags about her shoulders and leads her out.*) That's it. Steady. I'm sick myself—poisoned with alcohol.

KOSTYLYOV (*in the doorway*): Out for a walk? How pretty the two, the lamb and the ewe!

ACTOR: Out of the way! Can't you see we're sick?

KOSTYLYOV: Oh, yes! By all means! (*Humming a church tune through his nose, he glances suspiciously about the lodging, turning his head as if listening for something in Pepel's room. Kleshch viciously jangles the keys and rasps with his file, watching the movements of the landlord from under lowered brows.*) Scratching away?

KLESHCH: What's that?

KOSTYLYOV: I say, scratching away? (*Pause.*) Hm. Now then, what was it I wanted to ask? (*Speaking quickly and in a low voice.*) Has my wife been here?

KLESHCH: Didn't see her.

KOSTYLYOV (*stealing toward the door to Pepel's room*): You're taking up a lot of space for two rubles a month, aren't you? A bed, and a place to sit besides. Hm. Worth at least five rubles. I'll have to throw on another half ruble.

KLESHCH: Throw on a noose and choke me to death! On your last legs, and still wondering how you can snatch another half a ruble!

KOSTYLYOV: Why should I choke you? Who'd profit by that? Live on, and may the Lord help you. But I'll throw on that extra half-ruble just the same! I'll buy some oil for my icon lamp and let it burn before the holy image, a sacrifice in retribution for my sins, and for yours too. You never think of your sins, do you now? Oh, it's a wicked man you are, Andrei! Your wife has wasted away from your meanness. Nobody likes you, nobody respects you. Scraping away at that iron of yours, getting on everybody's nerves—

KLESHCH (*shouting*): Did you come here just to poison my life?

(*Satin roars.*)

KOSTYLYOV (*with a start*): Good gracious, my good man—

ACTOR (*entering*): I fixed her up out there in the passage, wrapped her up.

KOSTYLYOV: You have a kind heart, brother. That's a good thing. It'll all be counted to your credit.

ACTOR: When?

KOSTYLYOV: In the next world, brother. There everything, every little deed, is counted.

ACTOR: Maybe you'll reward me for my kindness here and now?

KOSTYLYOV: How could I do that?

ACTOR: By crossing out half my debt.

KOSTYLYOV: Hee-hee! You will have your fun, your little jokes! As if a kind heart could be rewarded with money! Goodness is the highest of all blessings. But a debt's a debt, which means it must be paid. As to the kindness you show an old man like me, you shouldn't seek reward for it!

ACTOR: A rapscallion, that's what you are, old man!

*(Goes out into the kitchen. Kleshch gets up and goes out into the passage.)*

KOSTYLYOV *(to Satin)*: The scraper here, he ran away. Hee-hee! He don't like me.

SATIN: Who but the devil could like you?

KOSTYLYOV *(playfully)*: Now why should you say such things to me! Me, as loves you all so! Don't I know you're all my brothers, my poor, unfortunate, fallen brothers? *(Suddenly and quickly.)* Er . . . a . . . Vasya—is he home?

SATIN: Go and look.

KOSTYLYOV *(going over and knocking at the door)*: Vasya!

*(The Actor appears in the kitchen door chewing something.)*

PEPEL: Who's there?

KOSTYLYOV: It's me. Me, Vasya.

PEPEL: What do you want?

KOSTYLYOV *(moving away)*: Open the door.

SATIN *(without looking at Kostylyov)*: He'll open the door, and there she is.

*(The Actor gives a snort.)*

KOSTYLYOV (*uneasily, in a lowered voice*): What? Who's there? What did you say?

SATIN: You speaking to me?

KOSTYLYOV: What was it you said?

SATIN: Nothing special. Talking to myself.

KOSTYLYOV: Watch your step, brother! A joke's a joke, but in the right place! (*Knocks sharply at the door.*) Vasya!

PEPEL (*opening the door*): Well? What do you come here bothering me for?

KOSTYLYOV (*peeping into the room*): I... you see... you....

PEPEL: Did you bring the money?

KOSTYLYOV: I have some business with you.

PEPEL: Did you bring the money?

KOSTYLYOV: What money? Wait a minute.

PEPEL: The seven rubles for the watch. Where is it?

KOSTYLYOV: What watch, Vasya? My goodness, you—

PEPEL: Careful, careful! People saw me sell you that watch yesterday for ten rubles—three rubles down, seven to come. Let's have it. Why do you stand there gaping? Hanging around disturbing everybody instead of going about your business!

KOSTYLYOV: Sh-h-h! Don't be angry, Vasya! The watch, it's—

SATIN: Stolen goods.

KOSTYLYOV: I don't handle stolen goods! How dare you—

PEPEL (*taking him by the shoulders*): What are you pestering me for? What do you want?

KOSTYLYOV: Me? Why, nothing. Nothing at all. I'll be going if you're like that.

PEPEL: Get out, and bring me that money!

KOSTYLYOV (*leaving*): Bah! Such coarse people!

ACTOR: A real comedy!

SATIN: Good. That's what I like.

PEPEL: What was he doing here?

SATIN (*laughing*): Can't you guess? Looking for his wife. Why don't you bump him off, Vasya?

PEPEL: As though I'd ruin my life for a swine like him!

SATIN: Be smart about it. Then you could marry Vasilisa and collect our rents.

PEPEL: Wouldn't that be fun! Before I knew it you'd guzzle down all my property and me in the bargain, out of the goodness of my heart. (*Sitting down on one of the bunks.*) The old devil! He woke me up. And I was having such a nice dream! I dreamt I was fishing and caught a huge pike. Couldn't find a pike that size outside of a dream. There it was on the end of the line, and me scared the rod would snap, so I get a net ready—here, thinks I, I'll catch it now—

SATIN: That wasn't a pike. It was Vasilisa.

ACTOR: He caught Vasilisa long ago.

PEPEL (*angrily*): You can all go to the devil, and take her with you!

KLESHCH (*entering from the passage*): Devilishly cold!

ACTOR: Why didn't you bring Anna in? She'll freeze out there.

KLESHCH: Natasha took her into the kitchen.

ACTOR: The old man will chase her out.

KLESHCH (*sitting down to work*): Then Natasha will bring her back.

SATIN: Vasya! Lend me five kopeks!

ACTOR (*to Satin*): Five kopeks? Vasya! Lend us twenty kopeks!

PEPEL: I'd better hurry and give it to them before they ask for a ruble. Here.

SATIN: Thermopylae! Thieves are the finest people in the world!

KLESHCH (*sullenly*): Money comes easy to them. They don't work.

SATIN: Lots of people get money easy, but not many give it up easy. Work? Find me work it's a pleasure to do, and maybe I'll do it. Hm. Maybe. When work is a pleasure, life is a joy. When work is a duty, life is slavery! (*To the Actor.*) Come, O Sardanapalus! Let us be going!

ACTOR: Let us be going, oh Nebuchadnezzar! I'll get as soused as forty thousand sots!

(*They go out.*)

PEPEL (*yawning*): How's your wife?

KLESHCH: You can see it won't be long now.

(*Pause.*)

PEPEL: Why in the world do you keep on scraping away there?

KLESHCH: What else should I do?

PEPEL: Nothing.

KLESHCH: Then how'd I feed myself?

PEPEL: Other people manage.

KLESHCH: Who, these here? Do you call them people? Tramps! Ragamuffins! Scum of the earth! I'm a working man, and it makes me ashamed just to look at them. I've been working as long as I can remember. You think I won't pull myself out of here? I will! I may scrape all the skin off my body, but I'll crawl out of here. Just you wait—my wife will die soon. I've only been living here six months, but it seems like six years.

PEPEL: You're no better than the rest of us, so there's no sense in talking like that.

KLESHCH: No better! You have no honour, no conscience!

PEPEL (*indifferently*): Who wants them—honour and conscience? You can't wear honour and conscience on your feet in place of boots. It's only those in power who need honour and conscience.

BUBNOV (*coming in*): Br-r-r! I'm frozen.

PEPEL: Bubnov! Have you got a conscience?

BUBNOV: What's that? A conscience?

PEPEL: Yes, a conscience.

BUBNOV: Why should I? I'm not rich.

PEPEL: That's what I say: it's only the rich who need honour and conscience. But Kleshch here is bawling us out. Our conscience, he says—

BUBNOV: Would he like to borrow a conscience?

PEPEL: Oh no, he's got a fine one of his own.

BUBNOV (*to Kleshch*): So he's selling it? Well, he won't find a customer here. If it was some old cards now, I might be interested—and then only if he'd let me have them on credit.

PEPEL (*instructively*): You're a fool, Andrei! When it comes to conscience, you'd do well to listen to Satin—or even the Baron.

KLESHCH: There's nothing they can teach me.

PEPEL: They've got more brains than you have, even if they are drunks.

BUBNOV: The man who's drunk as well as wise, has won himself a double prize.

PEPEL: Satin says everybody wants others to have a conscience, but nobody wants one himself. That's the truth.

(*Natasha comes in. She is followed by Luka with a stick in his hand, a knapsack on his back, a pot and a tea-kettle tied to his belt.*)

LUKA: Greetings to you, honest folk.

PEPEL: (*stroking his moustache*): Ah, Natasha!

BUBNOV (*to Luka*): We were honest in the past, the year before last.

NATASHA: Here's a new lodger.

LUKA: It's all the same to me. I have respect for crooks too. Not a flea but has its merits, the way I look at it.

They're all of them black, they all of them jump. Now where were you thinking to put me up, my dear?

NATASHA (*pointing to the kitchen door*): In there, grandad.

LUKA: Thank you, my girl. If you say there, then it's there I go. Any place that's warm is home to old bones.

PEPEL: A queer old fellow you've brought in, Natasha.

NATASHA: He's better than you are. Andrei, your wife is sitting in our kitchen. Come and get her in a little while.

KLESHCH: All right. I will.

NATASHA: You might be a little gentler with her now. You can see it won't be long.

KLESHCH: I know.

NATASHA: It's not enough to know. You've got to understand. After all, it's dreadful to die.

PEPEL: I'm not afraid.

NATASHA: Aren't you now! Such a fine brave fellow!

BUBNOV (*giving a little whistle*): The thread's rotten!

PEPEL: Honest to goodness I'm not. I'm ready to die this very minute! Take that knife and stick it in my heart. I'll die without so much as a gasp. I'll even be glad, because it's by a spotless hand.

NATASHA (*going out*): Do you expect me to swallow that?

BUBNOV (*with a wail*): The thread is rotten!

NATASHA (*at the door to the passage*): Don't forget about your wife, Andrei.

KLESHCH: I won't.

PEPEL: There's a girl for you!

BUBNOV: Not bad.

PEPEL: Why is she like that with me? Always putting me off. She'll be ruined if she stays here.

BUBNOV: It's because of you she'll be ruined.

PEPEL: What makes you say that? I... I pity her.

BUBNOV: Like the wolf pities the lamb.

PEPEL: That's a lie! It's hard for her to live here. I can see that.

KLESHCH: You just wait until Vasilisa catches you talking to her!

BUBNOV: Vasilisa? She's not one to give away things for nothing. She's a ferocious dame!

PEPEL (*lying on the bed*): To hell with the two of you! A couple of prophets!

KLESHCH: You'll see. Just wait.

LUKA (*singing in the kitchen*): Midnight glo-o-om . . . the road is lost in da-a-rkness. . . .

KLESHCH (*going into the passage*): What's he howling about? Another one!

PEPEL: What a bore life is! Funny, how I get like this at times. A bloke lives along day after day, without noticing anything, and then all of a sudden he feels as if he had caught a chill. Very tiresome.

BUBNOV: Tiresome? Hm.

PEPEL: Very.

LUKA (*singing*): Ah-h! No pa-a-th in sight! . . .

PEPEL: Hey! Old man!

LUKA (*peering through the door*): Is it me you're calling?

PEPEL: Yes, you. Stop singing.

LUKA (*coming out*): Don't you like it?

PEPEL: I might if it was good.

LUKA: You mean to say it's no good?

PEPEL: Exactly.

LUKA: Fancy that! And here was I thinking I had a good voice It's always like that: a person thinks to himself—my, don't I do that nice; and then somebody comes along and says it's no good.

PEPEL (*laughing*): True enough.

BUBNOV: A minute ago you were bored to death, and now you're laughing.

PEPEL: What do you care, you old croaker!

LUKA: What's that? Who's feeling bored?

PEPEL: Me. I'm the one.

(*The Baron comes in.*)

LUKA: Fancy that! There's a girl sitting out there in the kitchen reading a book and crying. Really crying. Tears running down her cheeks. I says to her: "What is it, dearie?" And she says, "The poor man!" And I says, "What man?" "Here in the book," she says. Now what would make a person spend time on things like that? She must be bored, like you.

BARON: She's a fool.

PEPEL: Ah, the Baron! Had your tea?

BARON: I have. What next?

PEPEL: Would you like me to stand you a half-pint?

BARON: I would. What next?

PEPEL: Get down on all fours and bark like a dog.

BARON: Blockhead! Do you take yourself for a rich merchant? Or are you just drunk?

PEPEL: Go ahead and bark to amuse me. You're a gentleman, and once upon a time you didn't look on people like us as human beings.

BARON: Well, what next?

PEPEL: Well, so now I'm telling you to get down on all fours and bark like a dog, and you're going to do it, do you hear?

BARON: I do, you fool, and I'm going to do it. But I don't see what pleasure it can give you, once I myself realize I've become almost worse than you are. You wouldn't have tried to make me get down on all fours when I was your superior.

BUBNOV: True enough.

LUKA: Very well put.

BUBNOV: What's past is past and nothing left but chicken feathers. There's none of your fine gentlemen here.

All the colours have been washed off. Nothing but naked people.

LUKA: In other words, everybody's equal. But were you really a baron once, my good man?

BARON: What do you call this? Who are you, you hobgoblin?

LUKA (*laughing*): I've seen a count, I've seen a prince, but never before have I seen a baron, and a mangy one at that.

PEPEL (*laughing*): A baron! You make me blush!

BARON: It's time you had more sense, Vasya!

LUKA: Dear, dear, dear! When I look at you, brothers, the way you live! Ah, me!

BUBNOV: We wake with a groan, and sleep with a moan—that's the way we live.

BARON: We lived better once upon a time. I remember waking up in the morning and having coffee served to me in bed. Coffee and cream.

LUKA: It's human beings we are, all of us. No matter what airs we put on, no matter how we make believe, it's human beings we were born, and it's human beings we'll die. People are getting wiser, the way I see it, and more interesting. The worse they live, the better they want to live. A stubborn lot, human beings!

BARON: Who are you, old man? Where did you come from?

LUKA: Me?

BARON: Are you a pilgrim?

LUKA: We're all pilgrims on this earth. I've heard it said that this very earth of ours is a pilgrim in the skies.

BARON (*sternly*): Let that be as it may, but you—have you a passport?

LUKA (*after a pause*): And who might you be, a nark?

PEPEL (*joyfully*): Good for you, old man! He took a pretty nip out of you that time, you Baron, you!

BUBNOV: Yes, he put our fine gentleman in his place!

BARON (*embarrassed*): Well, what of it? I was only joking, old man. I don't own one of those documents myself.

BUBNOV: Liar!

BARON: That is, I have some papers, but they're no good.

LUKA: They're all the same, those papers. None of them's any good.

PEPEL: Let's go and have a drink, Baron.

BARON: I don't object! Well, good-bye, old man. You're a rascal, that's what you are!

LUKA: Takes all kinds of people to make the world.

PEPEL (*at the door to the passage*): Come on if you're coming! (*Goes out. The Baron hurries after him.*)

LUKA: Was he really a baron once?

BUBNOV: Who knows? It's true he's from the gentry. Even now, all of a sudden, he'll do something that shows he's from the gentry. He don't seem to have got out of the habit yet.

LUKA: Belonging to the gentry's like having the smallpox—a person may recover, but the scars remain.

BUBNOV: He's all right on the whole—just gets up on his hind legs once in a while, like about your passport.

ALYOSHKA (*enters slightly drunk, whistling and playing on an accordion*): Hey, lodgers!

BUBNOV: What are you bawling about?

ALYOSHKA: Excuse me. Forgive me. I'm very polite by nature.

BUBNOV: Been on a spree again?

ALYOSHKA: Haven't I, just! The policeman Medyakin just threw me out of the station and said, "Don't let me catch a sniff of you in the street again!—Not a teenty-weenty!" says he. But I'm a person of character. My boss snarls at me, but what's a boss? Pooh, pooh! A mere misunderstanding! He's a drunk, my boss is, and I'm a person as doesn't care about nothing. I don't want

nothing! Here, take me for half a ruble. I don't want nothing! (*Nastya enters from the kitchen.*) Offer me a million—I won't have it! And do you think I'll let anybody, especially a drunk, tell me what to do? Not on your life!

(*As she stands in the doorway, Nastya watches Alyoshka and shakes her head.*)

LUKA (*kindly*): What a muddle you've got yourself into, young man!

BUBNOV: Crazy, that's what he is!

ALYOSHKA (*throwing himself on the floor*): Here, eat me up! I don't want nothing! I'm a desperate fellow! Try and prove to me who's my betters! Why am I any worse than the rest? That Medyakin says to me, I'll smash your mug in if I catch you in the street! But out I'll go! Out I'll go and lie down in the middle of the street—here, run over me! I don't want nothing!

NASTYA: Poor fellow! Twisted and knotted at such an early age!

ALYOSHKA (*catching sight of her and getting up on his knees*): Mademoiselle! Parlez français! Merci! Bouillon! I've been on a spree!

NASTYA (*in a loud whisper*): Vasilisa!

VASILISA (*opening the door quickly and speaking to Alyoshka*): You here again?

ALYOSHKA: How d'ye do! Be so kind—

VASILISA: I warned you not to show yourself again, you puppy, and here you are!

ALYOSHKA: Vasilisa Karpovna! Here, I'll play you a funeral march, want me to?

VASILISA (*taking him by the shoulder*): Get out!

ALYOSHKA (*making for the door*): Wait a minute! The funeral march! I just learned it! A brand-new tune! Wait a minute! You can't do that!

VASILISA: I'll show you whether I can or not! I'll set the whole street against you, you heathen! You're too young to go around yapping about me!

ALYOSHKA (*running out*): I'm off!

VASILISA (*to Bubnov*): Don't let me catch him here again, hear?

BUBNOV: I'm not a watchdog.

VASILISA: What do I care what you call yourself. Don't forget you're living on charity. How much do you owe me?

BUBNOV (*undisturbed*): I haven't counted.

VASILISA: Well, I'll count it for you!

ALYOSHKA (*opening the door and shouting*): Vasilisa Karpovna! You can't scare me! You can't scare me-e-e! (*Disappears.*)

(*Luka laughs.*)

VASILISA: And who might you be?

LUKA: A wanderer. A pilgrim.

VASILISA: For the night or to stay?

LUKA: I'll have a look around first.

VASILISA: Passport?

LUKA: If you like—

VASILISA: Give it to me!

LUKA: I'll deliver it... er... to your chambers in person.

VASILISA: A pilgrim? A tramp's more like it!

LUKA (*with a sigh*): You're not a very gentle soul.

(*Vasilisa goes over to the door of Pepel's room. Alyoshka pokes his head through the kitchen door and whispers,* "Has she gone?")

VASILISA (*turning to him*): You still here?

(*Alyoshka gives a piercing whistle and disappears. Nastya and Luka laugh.*)

BUBNOV (*to Vasilisa*): He's not here.

VASILISA: Who?

BUBNOV: Vasya.

VASILISA: Did I ask you where he was?

BUBNOV: Well, you were sniffing about.

VASILISA: I'm looking to see that everything's in order, see? Why hasn't the floor been swept? How many times have I ordered you to keep this place clean?

BUBNOV: It's the Actor's turn to sweep.

VASILISA: I don't care whose turn it is! If the sanitary inspector comes and fines me I'll throw you all out!

BUBNOV (*calmly*): And then what'll you live on?

VASILISA: Don't let me find a speck on the floor! (*Going towards the kitchen and speaking to Nastya.*) What are you moping here for with your mug all swollen? Standing there like a dummy! Sweep up this floor! Have you seen Natasha? Has she been here?

NASTYA: I don't know. I didn't see her.

VASILISA: Bubnov! Was my sister here?

BUBNOV (*indicating Luka*): She brought him in.

VASILISA: And that one—was he home?

BUBNOV: Vasya? He was. But Natasha only spoke to Kleshch.

VASILISA: I'm not asking you who she spoke to! Dirt everywhere! Filth! A lot of swine! Get this place cleaned up, do you hear?

(*Goes out quickly.*)

BUBNOV: Was there ever a woman as nasty as her?

LUKA: She's not one to fool with!

NASTYA: Anybody'd get nasty from such a life. Tie anybody up to a husband like hers—

BUBNOV: She's not tied very tight.

LUKA: Does she always go about exploding like that?

BUBNOV: Always. She came to see her lover, and he wasn't here.

LUKA: That *is* annoying, of course. (*Sighs.*) Dear, dear, dear! The number of people as try to run this earth of ours, all of them threatening fearful threats. And still there's no order and no cleanliness!

BUBNOV: They want order, but they haven't got the brains to make it. Still, the floor's got to be swept. Nastya! Why don't you do it?

NASTYA: Why do you suppose? Am I your chambermaid? (*After a moment's silence.*) I'm going to get drunk today—crazy drunk.

BUBNOV: At least that's something.

LUKA: Why do you want to get drunk, my girl? Just a little while back you were crying, and now you say you want to get drunk.

NASTYA (*challengingly*): I'll get drunk and start crying all over again. That's all.

BUBNOV: Not very much.

LUKA: But what's the cause? Even a pimple has its cause.

(*Nastya shakes her head in silence.*)

LUKA: Dear, dear, dear! Such people! Whatever's going to become of you? Here, I'll sweep the floor for you. Where's the broom?

BUBNOV: Behind the door in the passage.

(*Luka goes out into the passage.*)

BUBNOV: Nastya!

NASTYA: What?

BUBNOV: Why did Vasilisa go after Alyoshka like that?

NASTYA: He's been telling everybody that Vasya was sick of her and was going to throw her over for Natasha. I'd better get out of here—move to another place.

BUBNOV: What's that? Where to?

NASTYA: I'm sick of it all. I'm not wanted here.

BUBNOV (*complacently*): Nor anywhere else. Nobody's wanted on this earth.

(*Nastya shakes her head, gets up and quietly goes out into the passage. Medvedev enters, followed by Luka with the broom.*)

MEDVEDEV: I don't think I know you.

LUKA: And do you know all the others?

MEDVEDEV: I'm supposed to know all the people on my beat. But I don't know you.

LUKA: That's because not all the earth falls within your beat, uncle. There's a wee little bit left over.

(*Goes out into the kitchen.*)

MEDVEDEV (*going over to Bubnov*): My beat may not be big, but it's worse than a big one. Just now, before knocking off, I had to take Alyoshka the cobbler to the station, and what do you suppose he did? Laid down in the middle of the street, started playing on his accordion and yelling "I don't want nothing!" There was horses going by, and carts and things. He might have got run over or something. He's a noisy youngster. But I've fixed him up, all right. He seems to like making a row.

BUBNOV: Coming over for a game of draughts tonight?

MEDVEDEV: All right. Hm.... What about that Vasya?

BUBNOV: Nothing special. Same as ever.

MEDVEDEV: In other words, alive and kicking?

BUBNOV: Why not? No reason why he shouldn't be alive and kicking.

MEDVEDEV (*doubtfully*): You think so? (*Luka goes out into the passage carrying a pail.*) There was some gossip going round about Vasya. Haven't you heard it?

BUBNOV: I hear lots of gossip.

MEDVEDEV: About him and Vasilisa. It seems ... er ... haven't you noticed anything?

BUBNOV: What, for instance?

MEDVEDEV: Well . . . anything. Maybe you know and won't tell. Everybody knows. (*Sternly.*) No lying, now!

BUBNOV: Why should I lie?

MEDVEDEV: That's it, the dirty dogs! They say Vasya and Vasilisa . . . you know. But what do I care? I'm not her father—only her uncle. Why should folk laugh at me? (*Kvashnya comes in.*) Whatever's come over people lately—laughing at everybody. Ah, it's you! Back already!

KVASHNYA: My most respected police force! He kept pestering me at the market again, Bubnov. Nothing will do but I must marry him!

BUBNOV: Go ahead. Why not? He's got money, and isn't too rickety yet.

MEDVEDEV: Me? Ho-ho!

KVASHNYA: You, old wolf, you! Don't touch my sore spot. I tried it once, getting married. It's like jumping through a hole in the ice. Once you've done it, you'll never forget it.

MEDVEDEV: Oh, come—husbands are different.

KVASHNYA: But I'm the same. As soon as my darling better half passed out—may he sizzle in hell!—I sat there blissfully for a whole day all by myself: just sat there trying to believe my good luck.

MEDVEDEV: If your husband beat you without good cause, you should have complained to the police.

KVASHNYA: I complained to God for eight years. He didn't help.

MEDVEDEV: It's forbidden to beat your wife nowadays. They're very strict nowadays. Law and order! Mustn't beat anybody without good cause—only to preserve order.

LUKA (*leading in Anna*): Now you see, we made it. How can a body like you go walking about all by herself—so shaky on her legs? Where's your place here?

ANNA (*showing him*): Thank you, grandad.

KVASHNYA: There she is, a married woman. Look at her!

LUKA: She's put together very shaky, poor little thing! I heard her moaning and found her clutching the wall, trying to make her way through the passage. You shouldn't let her walk about by herself.

KVASHNYA: Forgive us such an oversight, good sir. Her chambermaid, it seems, is having a day-off.

LUKA: Look at that—turning it into a joke! You can't do that to a person. Everybody's got some worth, however slight.

MEDVEDEV: You'd ought to keep an eye on her. What if she should die all of a sudden? That would be a great nuisance. Don't let her out of your sight.

LUKA: Quite right, Sergeant.

MEDVEDEV: Well, now, I may not quite be a sergeant as yet—

LUKA: Think of that, now! From the looks of you—

*(Noise and confusion in the passage. Stifled cries are heard.)*

MEDVEDEV: A row?

BUBNOV: Sounds like it.

KVASHNYA: I'll go and have a look.

MEDVEDEV: I've got to go too. Oh, these duties! I don't see why we should pull people apart who are fighting. They'd stop of themselves when they got tired. It'd be better to let them slug each other as much as they liked. They'd remember it and wouldn't be so quick to pick a fight the next time.

BUBNOV *(climbing down off his bunk)*: You speak to your chief about that.

KOSTYLYOV *(throwing open the door and shouting)*: Abram! Come quick! Vasilisa's after Natasha. She'll kill her! Hurry up!

*(Kvashnya, Medvedev and Bubnov rush into the passage. Luka shakes his head and gazes after them.)*

ANNA: Oh, Lord! Poor Natasha!

LUKA: Who's fighting?

ANNA: Our landladies. They're sisters.

LUKA (*going over to Anna*): What are they fighting over?

ANNA: Nothing special. They've got too much energy, that's all.

LUKA: What's your name?

ANNA: Anna. I keep looking at you—you remind me of my father, so soft and gentle.

LUKA: I've been pushed around a lot. That's what makes me so soft. (*He gives a crackling laugh.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT II

*The same scene. Evening. Satin, Krivoi Zob, the Baron and the Tatar are playing cards near the stove, while Kleshch and the Actor look on. Bubnov and Medvedev are having a game of draughts on Bubnov's bunk. Luka is sitting beside Anna. The lodging is lighted by two lamps, one of them on the wall near the card-players, the other on Bubnov's bunk.*

TATAR: Once more I play. That's all I play ...
BUBNOV: Zob! Sing us a song! (*Sings.*)

Every morn the sun arises....

KRIVOI ZOB (*joining in*):

Still my cell is filled with gloom....

TATAR (*to Satin*): Shuffle cards. Shuffle good. We know how you play.
BUBNOV and KRIVOI ZOB (*together*):

Day and night the prison sentries,
Ah-h!
Watch the window of my room....

ANNA: Fights ... insults ... nothing else.... That's all I've seen ... all I've known.

LUKA: Ah, my poor dearie, don't fret!

MEDVEDEV: Hey, where are you moving! Watch out!

BUBNOV: Hm. Well....

TATAR (*shaking his fist at Satin*): Why you hide them cards? I see! You god-damn....

KRIVOI ZOB: Forget it, Asan! They'll cheat us anyway. Bubnov, start up the song again!

ANNA: I never had enough to eat... counted every crumb... always trembled with fear... scared to eat more than the other person... never had anything to wear but rags. Why?

LUKA: Poor little thing! Are you tired? Everything will be all right.

ACTOR (*to Krivoi Zob*): Throw on your Jack—your Jack, damn you!

BARON: And we've got the King!

KLESHCH: They always go one higher.

SATIN: It's a habit of ours.

MEDVEDEV: King!

BUBNOV: Me too. Well, now?

ANNA: And now I'm dying....

KLESHCH: See that? See that? Quit the game, Asan! Quit it, I say!

ACTOR: Can't he think for himself?

BARON: You watch out, Andrei, or I'll send you flying straight to hell!

TATAR: Come on. Deal again. The pitcher bring water and broke herself. Me too.

(*Kleshch shakes his head and goes over to Bubnov.*)

ANNA: I keep thinking: dear God, will this torture go on in the next world too? There too?

LUKA: No, no. You won't suffer there, my pretty. Sleep in peace. Everything will be all right. You'll have a good rest there. Be patient just a little longer. Everybody has got to be patient—each in his own way.

(*He gets up and goes into the kitchen with quick little steps.*)

BUBNOV (*singing*):

Guard my window at your pleasure—

KRIVOI ZOB:

I will never run away!

(*In unison.*)

Though I languish for my freedom,
Ah-h!
Chains are forcing me to stay!

TATAR (*shouting*): Aha! Put card up sleeve!

BARON (*in some embarrassment*): Well, where do you expect me to put it—up your nose?

ACTOR (*convincingly*): You're mistaken, Asan. No one has ever—

TATAR: I see! Cheat! I no play!

SATIN (*gathering up the cards*): All right, get out, Asan. You knew we were cheats. Why did you start playing with us?

BARON: Lost twenty kopeks and makes a noise like three rubles! And calls himself a Tatar!

TATAR (*angrily*): Gotta play fair!

SATIN: What for?

TATAR: What you mean, what for?

SATIN: Just what I said—what for?

TATAR: You don't know?
SATIN: No, I don't know. Do you know?

(*The Tatar spits in anger, the others laugh at him.*)

KRIVOI ZOB (*undisturbed*): You're crazy, Asan. Can't you see that if they tried living honestly, they'd starve to death in three days?
TATAR: I no care. Gotta live honest.
KRIVOI ZOB: Harping on the old string. Come on, let's go and have our tea. Bubnov!

Ah, my chains, my iron halter....

BUBNOV:

Unrelenting iron guard....

KRIVOI ZOB: Come along, Asan! (*He goes out singing.*)

I can neither loose nor break them....

(*The Tatar shakes his fist at the Baron, then follows his friend out.*)

SATIN (*laughing and addressing the Baron*): Once again, your honourable honour, it seems you have been dumped in a ditch. Hm, an educated gentleman, and don't know how to slip a card up your sleeve!
BARON (*shrugging his shoulders*): How the devil it ever happened!
ACTOR: No talent. No faith in yourself. Without that—nothing. Failure.
MEDVEDEV: I've got one King, but you've got two.
BUBNOV: You can still win if you're smart. Your move.
KLESHCH: You've lost already, Abram Ivanich!
MEDVEDEV: Keep out of this, hear? Shut up!

SATIN: Winnings—fifty-three kopeks!

ACTOR: Three of them go to me. But what do I want with three kopeks?

LUKA (*entering from the kitchen*): Well, now you've stripped the Tatar, I suppose you'll be going out for a drink?

BARON: Come with us.

SATIN: I'd like to see what you're like when you're drunk.

LUKA: No better than when I'm sober.

ACTOR: Come on, old man. I'll recite some verses to you.

LUKA: What's that?

ACTOR: Poetry.

LUKA: Poetry? What do I want with poetry?

ACTOR: It can be amusing. But it can also be sad.

SATIN: Well, poet, are you coming?

(*Goes out with the Baron.*)

ACTOR: Coming. I'll catch you up! Listen to this, old man. It's from some poem. Ugh . . . I can't remember the beginning. Can't remember! (*Rubs his forehead.*)

BUBNOV: Here goes your King! Your move!

MEDVEDEV: I shouldn't have moved there, damn it all!

ACTOR: Formerly, when my organism was not yet poisoned with alcohol, I had a good memory, old man. But now—? Everything's over for me now. I always brought down the house with those lines—tremendous applause! And you don't know what applause means, my friend. Applause is like vodka! I used to come out and stand like this. (*Strikes a pose.*) I'd stand like this . . . and . . . . (*He is silent.*) Can't remember a word—not a word. And it was my favourite poem. That's pretty bad, isn't it, old man?

LUKA: It is, once it's your favourite. All your soul goes into your favourite.

ACTOR: I've drunk up my soul, old man. I'm ruined. And why? Because I had no faith in myself. I'm done for.

LUKA: That's nothing. All you have to do is take a cure. They cure people of drunkenness nowadays, haven't you heard? Cure them free of charge. They've opened up a kind of healing centre, so to speak, where they cure them for nothing. That's because they see a drunkard's also a human being, and they're even glad when he wants to be cured. So you just go there. Go and try it, do.

ACTOR (*pensively*): Where? Where is this place?

LUKA: It's in some city or other. What do they call it? A funny name. Let me see . . . never fear, I'll find out the name. Meantime, you be getting yourself ready. Drop the vodka. Take yourself in hand and hold on, and then you'll go for a cure and begin life all over again. Won't that be fine? All over again. Just make up your mind, once and for all!

ACTOR (*smiling*): All over again. All from the beginning. Yes, that sounds fine. All over again. (*Laughs.*) Of course! I can do it! Don't you think I can do it?

LUKA: Of course you can. A person can do anything, if he wants to badly enough.

ACTOR (*as though suddenly waking up*): You're a little cracked, aren't you, old man? Well, good-bye for the present. (*Whistling.*) Good-bye, old man. (*Goes out.*)

ANNA: Grandad.

LUKA: What is it, dearie?

ANNA: Talk to me.

LUKA (*going over to her*): Very well. You and me'll have a nice little chat.

*(Kleshch watches them, then silently goes over to his wife, looks at her and makes movements with his hands as if there were something he wanted to say.)*

LUKA: What is it, brother?

KLESHCH (*under his breath*): Nothing.

(*Goes slowly towards the door to the passage, stands in front of it in hesitation a second or so, then suddenly goes out.*)

LUKA (*following him with his eyes*): It's hard for that man of yours.

ANNA: I can't be thinking of him now.

LUKA: Did he often beat you?

ANNA: Something awful. It's because of him I got like this.

BUBNOV: My wife had a lover once. The rascal played a good game of draughts.

MEDVEDEV: Hm.

ANNA: Grandad, please tell me something.... I'm feeling so bad....

LUKA: That's nothing. That's just before you die, pigeon. It'll be all right, dearie. You just keep hoping. This is how it'll be—you'll die now, you see, and everything'll be quiet and peaceful. You won't have to be afraid of nothing any more, nothing at all. Just lie there in peace and quiet. Death's kind to us poor mortals. He smooths out all the wrinkles, death does. That's why they say: eternal rest. And that's the truth, lovey, because where can a person hope to get any rest in this world?

(*Pepel comes in. He has had a drink, looks dishevelled and is in a sullen mood. He sinks down on a bunk by the door and sits there silent and motionless.*)

ANNA: But there in that other world—will we be tortured there too?

LUKA: There won't be nothing there. Nothing at all. You just believe me. Peace and quiet and nothing else.

They'll summon you before the Lord God and say: See, Lord, it's your faithful servant Anna who has come.

MEDVEDEV (*sternly*): How do you know what they'll say there? You're a fine one, you are!

(*On hearing Medvedev's voice, Pepel lifts his head and listens.*)

LUKA: If I say it, I must be knowing it, Sergeant—

MEDVEDEV (*appeased*): Hm. Maybe. I suppose that's your business. But I told you I'm not a sergeant. Not yet.

BUBNOV: Double jump.

MEDVEDEV: You devil. I hope you—

LUKA: And the Lord God will look at you so gentle and tender like, and say: Of course I know Anna! And He'll say: You just lead our Anna right into Paradise—that's what He'll say. Let her rest up a bit. I know what a hard life she's had. I know how tired she is. Let her have peace and quiet now.

ANNA (*gasping*): Oh, grandad ... dearest grandad ... if it would only be like that! If only ... peace and quiet ... not to feel anything....

LUKA: You won't feel anything, my pretty. Nothing at all. Believe me. You must die now gladly, without any fear. Death, I'm telling you, is a tender father to us, his children.

ANNA: But ... maybe ... maybe I'll get well?

LUKA (*smiling deprecatingly*): What for, dearie? To be tortured again?

ANNA: To live ... just a little ... just a little longer. Once you say there won't be any suffering there.... I could bear it here ... I could.

LUKA: There won't be nothing at all there. Just—

PEPEL (*getting up*): You're right. But maybe—you're wrong.

ANNA (*startled*): Good heavens!

LUKA: What's that, my handsome fellow?

MEDVEDEV: Who's shouting?

PEPEL (*going over to him*): Me! What of it?

MEDVEDEV: You oughtn't to shout, that's what. A person should conduct himself peaceful.

PEPEL: Blockhead! And their uncle! Ho-ho!

LUKA (*to Pepel, under his breath*): Stop shouting, hear? The woman's dying. The earth colour has come to her lips already. Leave her alone.

PEPEL: Out of respect for you, grandad. You're a smart feller, grandad. You lie beautifully. Nice to listen to your fairy-tales. Go ahead and lie. That's all right. Not many pleasant things to listen to in this world.

BUBNOV: Is it true she's dying?

LUKA: I think so.

BUBNOV: That means the end of her coughing. A nasty cough she had. Double jump.

MEDVEDEV: Pooh! Devil take you!

PEPEL: Abram!

MEDVEDEV: Who said you could call me by my first name?

PEPEL: Abram! Is Natasha sick?

MEDVEDEV: What business is it of yours?

PEPEL: You'd better tell me. Did Vasilisa beat her bad?

MEDVEDEV: It's none of your business. It's a family affair. Who are you to butt in?

PEPEL: Whoever I am, you'll never get another look at Natasha if I don't want you to.

MEDVEDEV (*leaving his draughts*): What? What's that? Who are you talking about? She's my niece, you thief, you!

PEPEL: I may be a thief, but you haven't caught me!

MEDVEDEV: Just wait! I'll catch you, all right. And soon!

PEPEL: If you catch me, it'll be the end of this little nest of yours. Do you think I'll keep my mouth shut in court? The wolf will bare his fangs. They'll ask me: Who

taught you to steal and showed you where? Mishka Kostylyov and his wife! Who handled your stolen goods? Mishka Kostylyov and his wife!

MEDVEDEV: You're a liar. Nobody'll believe you!

PEPEL: They'll believe me because it's the truth! And I'll drag you in, too—hah! I'll ruin all of you, you bastards! You'll see!

MEDVEDEV (*frightened*): Liar! You liar! What harm have I ever done you? Throwing yourself on me like a mad dog!

PEPEL: What *good* have you ever done me?

LUKA: Hm!

MEDVEDEV (*to Luka*): What are you croaking about? What business is it of yours? This is a family affair.

BUBNOV (*to Luka*): Keep out of it. The noose isn't for you and me.

LUKA (*meekly*): Yes. I'm just saying if a person hasn't done his neighbour good, he's done him bad.

MEDVEDEV (*missing the point*): Blah! We here, we all know each other, but you—who are you? (*Gives an angry snort and hurries out.*)

LUKA: The gentleman seems to be angry. Dear me! Your affairs here, brothers, are a bit tangled, as I see it.

PEPEL: He's run off to tell Vasilisa.

BUBNOV: You're a fool, Vasya. Showing off how brave you are! Watch out! It's all right to be brave when you go to the woods for mushrooms, but there's no sense in it here. They'll snap off your head in an instant.

PEPEL: Oh, no, they won't! Nobody's taking a fellow from Yaroslavl with his bare hands! If it's a fight they want, they'll get it!

LUKA: But really now, don't you think you'd do well to clear out of here, lad?

PEPEL: Where'll I go? Tell me that.

LUKA: Well now, Siberia for instance.

PEPEL: Not me. No, thank you. I'll wait to be sent to Siberia free of charge.

LUKA: Take my advice and go out there. Out there you'll find the right path to follow. They need people like you out there.

PEPEL: My path has been laid out for me. My father spent most of his life in jail and ordered me to do the same. Ever since I was a kid I've been called a thief, or the son of a thief.

LUKA: It's a fine place, Siberia. A golden land. If a person is strong and has a good head on his shoulders, he'll feel as snug there as a cucumber in a hot-house.

PEPEL: Why do you tell such lies, old man?

LUKA: Eh?

PEPEL: Deaf. What do you tell lies for, I say?

LUKA: What lies have I told?

PEPEL: Everything you say's a lie. Everything's good, according to you: this place, that place. A pack of lies. What makes you tell them?

LUKA: You just believe what I say and go out there to see for yourself. Then you'll say thank you. Why should you stay here? And why should you be so anxious to know the truth? The truth may turn out to be an axe on your neck.

PEPEL: It's all the same to me. If it's an axe, it's an axe.

LUKA: Foolish lad. There's no sense in killing yourself.

BUBNOV: What are you two arguing about? Is it the truth you're after, Vasya? What for? You know it without being told. Everybody knows it.

PEPEL: Quit your croaking. Let him tell me. Listen, old man—is there a God?

*(Luka smiles, but says nothing.)*

BUBNOV: People are like chips of wood floating on the river—and chips fly off as houses are built.

PEPEL: Well, is there? Speak up.

LUKA (*quietly*): There is if you believe there is; there isn't if you don't. Whatever you believe in, that's what there is.

(*Pepel stares at the old man in silent wonder.*)

BUBNOV: I'm going for my tea. Anyone coming along?
LUKA (*to Pepel*): What are you staring at?
PEPEL: Nothing. Listen, you mean—?
BUBNOV: Then I'll go alone.

(*Goes to the door and is met by Vasilisa.*)

PEPEL: In other words, you—
VASILISA (*to Bubnov*): Is Nastya here?
BUBNOV: No. (*Goes out.*)
PEPEL: Ah, here she is.
VASILISA (*going over to Anna*): Still alive?
LUKA: Don't disturb her.
VASILISA: What are you doing here?
LUKA: I can leave if you want me to.
VASILISA: (*going to the door of Pepel's room*): Vasya, there's something I want to speak to you about.

(*Luka goes to the door into the passage, opens it and slams it shut. Then he cautiously climbs from one of the bunks up on to the stove*).

VASILISA (*from Pepel's room*): Vasya, come here!
PEPEL: I don't feel like it.
VASILISA: What's the matter? What are you sore about?
PEPEL: I'm fed up. I'm sick of all this business.
VASILISA: Sick of me too?
PEPEL: Yes, you too.

(*Vasilisa pulls her shawl tight, pressing her hands to her breast. She goes over to Anna's bed, glances through the curtains, and crosses to Pepel.*)

PEPEL: Well, say what's on your mind.

VASILISA: What's there to say? I can't make you love me, and it's not my nature to go begging. Thanks for telling me the truth.

PEPEL: What truth?

VASILISA: That you're sick of me. Or maybe it's not the truth?

(*Pepel stares at her in silence.*)

VASILISA (*going up to him*): What are you looking at? Don't you recognize me?

PEPEL (*with a sigh*): You're too damn good-looking, Vasilisa. (*She puts her hand on his shoulder, but he shrugs it off.*) But you never won my heart. I lived with you, and all the rest, but I never liked you.

VASILISA (*under her breath*): So that's it! Well—

PEPEL: Well, and there's nothing for you and me to talk about! Nothing at all. Get away from me!

VASILISA: Have you fallen for somebody else?

PEPEL: What business is it of yours? If I had, I wouldn't ask you to help me get her.

VASILISA (*significantly*): Too bad. Maybe I *could* help you get her.

PEPEL (*suspiciously*): Get who?

VASILISA: You know. Why pretend? I'm used to talking straight, Vasya. (*Lowering her voice.*) I won't deny it—you've hurt me. It's as if you'd given me a lashing for no good reason and to no purpose. You said you loved me, and then all of a sudden—

PEPEL: Not all of a sudden. It's been like this for a long time. You have no heart, woman. A woman ought to have a heart. Us men are beasts, and you've got to . . . you've got to teach us. What did you ever teach me?

VASILISA: Let bygones be bygones. I know a person's not free in himself. If you don't love me any more, I can take it. That's how it'll be.

PEPEL: So now it's all over between us? And we part peaceable, without any scenes? That's good.

VASILISA: Oh, no! Wait a minute! Don't forget I always hoped you'd help me throw this yoke off my neck. I thought you'd help me get away from my husband, my uncle, from all this life. And maybe it wasn't you I loved so much as this hope, this idea of mine, see? I was waiting for you to pull me out.

PEPEL: You're no nail, I'm no pliers. I, too, thought that one as smart as you—you *are* smart—you're a clever one—

VASILISA (*straining towards him*): Vasya, let's help each other.

PEPEL: How?

VASILISA (*forcefully, in lowered tones*): My sister . . . I know you like her.

PEPEL: And so that's why you beat her? You watch out, Vasilisa! Keep your hands off her!

VASILISA: Wait. Don't flare up. We can arrange everything quietly, without getting mad. How would you like to—to marry her? I'd give you some money—three hundred rubles. If I get more, you can have that too.

PEPEL (*moving away*): What? What's behind this?

VASILISA: Help me get rid of my husband. Take that noose off my neck.

PEPEL (*whistling softly*): So that's it! Oho! You *are* smart! Your husband in his grave, your lover in jail, and you yourself—

VASILISA: Vasya! Why in jail? Don't do it yourself—get somebody else to do it. And even if you did do it yourself, who'd know? Natasha . . . think it over. . . . You'll have money. . . . You can go away. . . . I'll be free forever. . . . As for my sister—it'll be good for her to get away from me. It's hard for me to see her all the time. She makes me sore because of you. I can't stop myself. I torture her. I beat her. I beat her until it makes even me

cry to see her. But I beat her just the same, and I'll keep on beating her.

PEPEL: You're a brute, and you boast of it.

VASILISA: No, I don't. I just tell the truth. Think, Vasya. Twice they threw you in jail on account of that husband of mine—on account of his greediness. He sucks my blood like a leech—been sucking it for four years. What kind of a husband is he? And he keeps squeezing Natasha out, nagging her, calling her a beggar. He's poison for everybody.

PEPEL: You're a sly one.

VASILISA: It's clear as day. You'd have to be a fool not to understand what I'm after.

(*Kostylyov comes in quietly and steals forward.*)

PEPEL (*to Vasilisa*): Get out!

VASILISA: Think it over. (*Catches sight of her husband.*) What do you want? Have you come for me?

(*Pepel starts up and stares wildly at Kostylyov.*)

KOSTYLYOV: It's me, just me. You two here—alone? Having a little talk? (*Suddenly he stamps his foot and begins to screech.*) God damn you, Vasilisa! You beggar, you! (*He is frightened by his own shouts and by the frozen silence with which they are received.*) O Lord, forgive me! Leading me into sin again, Vasilisa! Here I am searching for you everywhere. (*Again raising his voice.*) It's high time you were in bed! Forgot to fill the icon lamp again, damn you! You pig! You pauper! (*He shakes a trembling finger at her. Vasilisa goes slowly to the door of the passage, her eyes fixed on Pepel.*)

PEPEL (*to Kostylyov*): Get out of here! Get out, I tell you!

KOSTYLYOV (*shouting*): It's me who owns this place. Get out yourself, you thief!

PEPEL (*in a strained voice*): Get out, I say.

KOSTYLYOV: Don't you dare! I'll show you! I'll—

(*Pepel takes him by the collar and starts shaking him. Suddenly someone is heard to move about on top of the stove and to give a loud and long-drawn yawn. Pepel lets go of Kostylyov, who runs with a cry into the passage.*)

PEPEL (*jumping up on to the bunk by the stove*): Who's there? Who's up on the stove?

LUKA (*poking his head up*): Eh?

PEPEL: You!

LUKA: Me. Me myself. Oh, dear Lord in heaven!

PEPEL (*shuts the door into the passage and looks vainly for the bar which secures it*): Damn it all! Climb down, old man!

LUKA: Ri-ight away! I'm coming!

PEPEL (*roughly*): Why did you crawl up on the stove?

LUKA: Where should I have crawled?

PEPEL: You went out into the passage.

LUKA: That's a cold place for an old man like me.

PEPEL: Did you . . . hear anything?

LUKA: 'Deed I did. How could I have helped hearing? Did you think I was deaf? Ah, lad, luck comes your way. You're a lucky one.

PEPEL (*suspiciously*): What makes you say that?

LUKA: It's lucky for you I crawled up on that stove.

PEPEL: Why did you make all that noise?

LUKA: It was getting too hot for me, that's why. And you can be thankful for that. The lad will be forgetting himself, thinks I. He'll be squeezing the breath out of that old feller.

PEPEL: I would have for sure. Ugh, how I hate—

LUKA: I know. Easy as sitting down. Lots of times people make slips like that.

PEPEL (*smiling*): Maybe you made such a slip yourself once upon a time?

LUKA: Listen, lad, listen to me. Keep away from that woman. Shoo her away. Shoo! Shoo! She'll get rid of that man of hers without your help, and better than you could do it. Don't listen to her, to that she-devil. Look at me—see how bald I am? And what might be the cause? Women. I've known more women in my time than I had hairs on my head. But this Vasilisa here is worse than any harpy.

PEPEL: I don't know whether I should say thank you or—

LUKA: Don't say nothing. You'll not find better words than those I've spoken. Listen to me—the lady that you're fond of—you just take her arm, right about face, and forward march! Get away from here! As far away as you can go!

PEPEL (*sullenly*): There's no knowing people—who's good and who's bad. There's no knowing.

LUKA: What's there to know? A person's not always the same. It all depends on how his heart's tuned. Today he's good, tomorrow he's bad. But if that girl has got a real grip on your soul, then be off with her, and that's that. Or else be off alone. You're young yet. You've got plenty of time to get a woman.

PEPEL (*taking him by the shoulders*): Tell me the truth. Why are you saying this?

LUKA: Here, let me go. I'll just have a look at Anna. She was breathing hard a minute ago. (*He goes over to Anna's bed, opens the curtains, looks in, touches her. Pepel watches him with a thoughtful, perplexed look on his face.*) Have mercy, O Lord! Mercifully receive the soul of Thy servant Anna.

PEPEL (*under his breath*): Dead? (*He strains forward to get a better look at the bed, but he does not go over to it.*)

LUKA (*softly*): It's all over now, her torture. Where's that man of hers?

PEPEL: In the pub, I suppose.

LUKA: He's got to be told.

PEPEL (*shuddering*): I hate corpses.

LUKA (*going to the door*): Why should you like them? It's the live ones we ought to like. The live ones.

PEPEL: I'll go with you.

LUKA: Afraid of the corpse?

PEPEL: Hate it.

(*They hurry out. The stage is empty and silent. Dull incomprehensible sounds come from beyond the door into the passage. At last the Actor comes in.*)

ACTOR (*he does not close the door, but stands on the threshold leaning against the jamb, calling out in a loud voice*): Old man! Where are you? It's come back to me! Listen! (*He takes two uncertain steps forward, strikes a pose, and recites*):

If no path can be found that leads
To the realms of sacred truth,
Then blesséd the crazéd mind
That brings men soaring dreams.

(*Natasha appears in the doorway behind the Actor.*)

ACTOR: Old man!

If tomorrow the sun should cease
To light the earth with its rays,
Tomorrow some madman's dream
Would illuminate the world.

NATASHA (*laughs*): Pie-eyed. The simpleton!

ACTOR (*turning to her*): Ah, it's you. Where's the old man? The lovely old man? Nobody here, it seems. Farewell, Natasha! Fare thee well!

NATASHA (*entering*): Saying farewell before you've said hullo?

ACTOR (*blocking her path*): I am ... going away. When spring comes I shall be no more.

NATASHA: Let me pass. Where are you going?

ACTOR: In search of a certain town. To take a cure. You, too, must leave. Ophelia, hie thee to a convent! There exists, it seems, a healing centre for organisms—for drunkards. A marvellous place. Everything marble—even the floors. Very bright. And clean. And lots of food. All for nothing. Marble floors—fancy that! I'll find it and get well and then.... I am about to be reborn, as the King said.... King Lear. My stage name is Sverchkov-Zavolzhsky, Natasha, but nobody knows it. Nobody. Here I have no name. Can you understand how it hurts to lose one's name? Even dogs have a name....

(*Natasha passes the Actor at a safe distance and goes over to Anna's bed, looking through the curtains.*)

ACTOR: No name, no man.

NATASHA: Look! Oh, dear! She's dead!

ACTOR (*shaking his head*): It cannot be.

NATASHA (*stepping back*): She is. Look.

BUBNOV (*in the doorway*): Look at what?

NATASHA: Anna. She's dead.

BUBNOV: At last she's stopped that coughing of hers. (*Goes over to Anna's bed, looks through the curtains, goes to his own bunk.*) Kleshch will have to be told. That's his business.

ACTOR: I'll go. I'll say—she's lost her name! (*Goes out.*)

NATASHA (*from the centre of the room*): And me too ... some day ... like that ... driven down into some basement ... downtrodden....

BUBNOV (*spreading some old rags out on the planks of his bunk*): What's that? What're you muttering about?

NATASHA: I was just thinking out loud.

BUBNOV: Waiting for Vasya? Watch out! You'll break your neck over that Vasya.

NATASHA: Does it make any difference what I break it over? Let it be him. He's better than most.

BUBNOV (*lying down*): That's your business.

NATASHA: It's a good thing, of course, her dying . . . but a pity. What does a person live for?

BUBNOV: It's the same for all of us: we get born, live our lives, and die. I'll die, and you will too. Why feel sorry for anybody?

(*Luka, the Tatar, Krivoi Zob and Kleshch come in. Kleshch is the last. He walks slowly and all hunched over.*)

NATASHA: Sh! Anna—

KRIVOI ZOB: We know. May she rest in peace, now she's dead.

TATAR (*to Kleshch*): Have to drag her out. Have to drag her into passage. Can't have dead people here. Live people sleep here.

KLESHCH (*in a quiet tone*): We'll drag her out.

(*They all go over to the bed. Kleshch stares at his wife over the shoulders of the others.*)

KRIVOI ZOB (*to the Tatar*): Do you think she'll smell? There's nothing to smell. She dried up while she was still alive.

NATASHA: Good Lord, you might at least feel sorry for her! Say one little word of pity! But not you!

LUKA: Don't mind them, dearie. How can they—how can any of us be expected to pity the dead if we don't pity the living? We don't even pity ourselves, let alone the dead!

BUBNOV (*yawning*): You can't scare death off with words. You can sickness, but not death.

TATAR (*moving away*): Call the police.

KRIVOI ZOB: Yes, we've got to do that, Kleshch! Have you notified the police?

KLESHCH: No. They'll make me bury her, and I've only got forty kopeks.

KRIVOI ZOB: In that case, borrow something. We can take up a collection—five kopeks—whatever a man's able. But hurry and notiiy the police or they'll be thinking you killed her or something.

(*Goes over to the bunks and is about to lie down beside the Tatar.*)

NATASHA (*going over to Bubnov*): Now I'll dream about her. I always dream about dead people. I'm afraid to go home alone. It's dark out there in the passage.

LUKA (*following her out*): It's the living ones you have to be afraid of, take my word for it.

NATASHA: See me out, grandad.

LUKA: Come along, come along. I'll take you. (*They go out. Pause.*)

KRIVOI ZOB: O-ho-ho! Asan! It'll soon be spring. At last we'll get warm. The muzhiks in the village have begun to mend their ploughs and their harrows. Getting ready to turn the soil. Hm. And us? Eh, Asan? Snoring away, the damn Mohammedan.

BUBNOV: Tatars are good at sleeping.

KLESHCH (*standing in the middle of the lodging and staring dully in front of him*): What am I to do now?

KRIVOI ZOB: Go to sleep, that's what.

KLESHCH (*softly*): And what about her?

(*Nobody answers. Satin and the Actor come in.*)

ACTOR (*shouting*): Old man! Come here, my loyal Kent!

SATIN: Make way for Miklukho-Maklai!

ACTOR: It's decided, once and for all. Old man! Where's that town? Where are you?

SATIN: Fata Morgana! The old fellow lied to you. There's nothing of the sort. No towns. No people. Nothing.

ACTOR: That's a lie!

TATAR (*jumping off his bed*): Where's boss? I go for boss. No can't sleep, why for I pay money? Dead people. Drunks.

(*Goes out quickly. Satin whistles after him.*)

BUBNOV (*sleepily*): Go to bed, fellows. Stop your noise. A man's supposed to sleep at night.

ACTOR: Ah! Here lies a corpse! "Our fishing nets have caught a corpse!" Poetry. Béranger!

SATIN (*shouting*): A corpse hears nothing! A corpse feels nothing! Shout as much as you like! A corpse hears nothing!

(*Luka appears in the doorway.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT III

*A back yard littered with rubbish and overgrown with weeds. A high brick fire-wall upstage cuts off a view of the sky. Against this wall grow elder bushes. To the right is a dark log wall—perhaps of a shed or a stable. On the left is Kostylyov's house with the lodging in the basement. It is grey and ramshackle, with the stucco crumbling off. It stands at an angle, so that the far corner reaches almost to upstage centre, leaving only a narrow passage between the brick wall and the house. There are two windows in the house, one a basement window downstage, the other about six feet higher and upstage. A log some 12 feet long lies near the house; beside it—a dilapidated and overturned wooden sledge. Old boards and beams form a pile of wood near the building on the right. Day is drawing to a close and the rays of the setting sun cast a red glow upon the brick wall. It is early spring; the snow has just melted and the black branches of the elder bushes are as yet without buds. Natasha and Nastya are sitting on the log; Luka and the Baron on the sledge; Kleshch is lying on the pile of wood to the right. Bubnov's face is seen at the basement window.*

NASTYA (*closing her eyes and nodding her head in rhythm to the sing-song chanting of her tale*): So he comes at night to the garden, to the summer-house, like we planned. I've been waiting so long I'm all atremble with fear and sorrow. And he's all atremble, and white as a sheet, and in his hand he holds an involver—

NATASHA (*chewing sunflower seeds*): See? So it must be true what they say about students being desperate.

NASTYA: And he says to me in a fearful voice: My precious love, he says—

BUBNOV: Ho-ho! Precious, did you say?

BARON: Shut up! If you don't like it, don't listen, but don't interfere with her lying. Next!

NASTYA: My precious, he says, my beloved! My parents, he says, will never consent to my marrying you. They threaten to lay their curse on me forever for loving you. And for that reason, he says, I must take my own life. And there he has that big involver with all those bullets in it. Farewell, he says, beloved of my heart. There's no changing my mind. I can't go on living without you! And I says to him: My adored friend! My Raoul!

BUBNOV (*in amazement*): What? How's that? Growl?

BARON (*roaring*): You've forgotten, Nastya! Last time he was Gaston!

NASTYA (*jumping up*): Shut up, you scum! You homeless pups! As though you could understand love—true love! But me—I've known it, true love! (*To the Baron.*) You're a nobody! You, with your education! You, as used to drink coffee in bed!

LUKA: Ju-u-ust a minute! Don't go stopping her, now! Let her go on. It's not the words that count, but what's behind them—that's the thing. Go on, my girl. Don't mind them.

BUBNOV: A crow in peacock's feathers. Well, let's hear the rest.

BARON: Go on.

NATASHA: Don't listen to them. Who are they? They're only jealous because they've got nothing to tell about themselves.

NASTYA (*sitting down again*): I don't want to go on. I won't tell you any more. Once they don't believe me and laugh at me— (*Suddenly she stops, is silent a minute, and then, closing her eyes, continues in a loud, impassioned voice, beating time with her hand as if listening to distant music.*) And I say to him: Joy of my life! Sun of my soul! Nor can I go on living in this world without you, because I love you with all my soul and will go on loving you as long as this heart beats in this breast. But don't end your life, which your dear parents need so bad, since you're all the joy they've got. Throw me over! Better my life should wear away with pining for you, my beloved! I'm all alone. I'm—I'm that sort. Let me go to my ruin. It's all the same. I'm not worth anything. There's nothing left for me.... Nothing left.... Nothing left....

(*She covers her face with her hands and weeps silently.*)

NATASHA (*turning away and speaking softly*): Don't cry. You mustn't.

(*Luka smiles and strokes Nastya's head.*)

BUBNOV (*laughing*): She's a fine one!

BARON (*also laughing*): You think that's the truth, grandad? That's all out of that book "Fatal Love." A lot of nonsense. Let her be!

NATASHA: What do you care? Keep your mouth shut, once the Lord saw fit to make you what you are.

NASTYA (*furiously*): You lost soul! You emptiness! Where's your heart?

LUKA (*taking Nastya by the hand*): We'll go away from here, dearie. Don't mind them. You're the one that's right, not them. I know. Once you believe you had that true love, you really did. You did indeed. But don't get angry with the fellow you live with. Maybe it's jealousy makes him laugh. Maybe he never knew that true kind. Maybe he never knew any kind at all. Come away.

NASTYA (*pressing her hands to her breast*): Believe me, grandad! I swear it was like that! Everything I said.... He was a student, a Frenchman. They called him Gaston. He had a black beard and wore patent-leather boots. Strike me dead this minute if it's not the truth! And how he loved me! How he loved me!

LUKA: I know. I believe you. Patent-leather boots, you say? Fancy that! And you loved him too? (*They disappear around the corner.*)

BARON: A stupid wench! She's got a good heart, but there never was anyone so stupid.

BUBNOV: Why should a person want to lie like that? And swear it's the truth, like in court.

NATASHA: It's more pleasant to lie than to tell the truth. Me, too—

BARON: You too? Next?

NATASHA: I keep dreaming and dreaming. And waiting.

BARON: What for?

NATASHA (*smiling self-consciously*): I don't know. I just keep thinking that tomorrow ... somebody will come ... somebody special. Or else something will happen.... Something unusual. And I keep waiting. Always waiting. But when you come to think of it, what could happen?

(*Pause.*)

BARON (*with a wry smile*): There's nothing to wait for. Me, for instance, I'm not waiting for anything. Everything's over. Passed. Finished. Next?

NATASHA: Or else I imagine tomorrow I'll die all of a sudden. And then everything goes cold inside me. Summer's a good time to imagine you'll die, because of the thunderstorms; you could easily get struck by lightning.

BARON: Yours is a poor sort of life, and it's all the fault of that sister of yours—a devilish temper she's got.

NATASHA: Who's got a good sort of life? Everybody has it bad. Don't I see it?

KLESHCH (*until now he had been lying motionless and detached, but at these words he springs up*): Everybody? That's a lie! Not everybody. If it was everybody it wouldn't be so bad. Then you wouldn't mind.

BUBNOV: What devil stuck his fork in you this time? Yelping like that!

(*Kleshch lies down again, muttering to himself.*)

BARON: I'd better go and make my peace with Nastya. If I don't, she'll hold out on the drink money.

BUBNOV: Hm. How people love to lie! Nastya, now, you can understand her. She's used to painting her mug, so she thinks she can do the same to her soul. Rouge her soul. But what do the others want to lie for? That Luka, for instance. He lies without getting anything out of it, and him an old man. What does he do it for?

BARON (*with a snort, as he goes out*): They've all got grey little souls. They'd all like to rouge them a bit.

LUKA (*entering from around the corner*): Why did you go and upset the girl, your lordship? Let her enjoy her cry. If it gives her pleasure to let the tears flow, why should you mind?

BARON: She's a dunce, old man. She gets on your nerves. Today it's Raoul, tomorrow Gaston, but the story's always the same. I'd better go and make my peace with her just the same. (*Goes out.*)

LUKA: That's right. Be nice and gentle with her. It never does any harm to be gentle with a person.

NATASHA: You've got a good heart, grandad. What makes you so kind?

LUKA: Kind, you say? Very well, if that's the way you see it. (*The soft music of an accordion and singing comes from the other side of the brick wall.*) Somebody has to be kind in this world. You've got to have sympathy for people. Christ loved everybody, and told us to do the same. And I can tell you truly that many a time you can save a person by pitying him in time. Like, for instance, that time I was a watchman on a country estate belonging to an engineer near the town of Tomsk. This estate, now, stood in the middle of the woods. It was winter-time—very beautiful—and me all alone on the estate. One day I hear noises—somebody breaking in!

NATASHA: Thieves?

LUKA: Thieves they were. Breaking in. I pick up my gun and go out. There they are, two of them, opening a window, and so busy at it they don't notice me. "Hey, you!" I shout. "Get out of here!" They turn on me with the axe. "If you don't keep back, I'll shoot!" I cry and point my gun first at one, then at the other. Down they go on their knees, begging me to let them go. But me, I'm mad by then, on account of the axe, and I says to them: I chased you away, you pixies, but you wouldn't go, so now, I says, one of you go and cut a good switch off those bushes. They bring the switch. Now, says I, one of you get down, and the other give him a thrashing. And that's how, according to my orders, they flogged each other. And when the flogging was over they say to me: "Grandad," they say, "give us something to eat for the love of Christ. We've been tramping the countryside on empty bellies." There's your thieves for you, my dear! (*Laughs.*) There's your axe for you! Both of them fine chaps at heart. I says to them: "Now why couldn't you have come and just asked me for something to eat at the very start?" "We're sick and tired of asking," they

say. "We asked and asked and nobody gave us anything." After that they lived with me for the whole winter. One of them, Stepan by name, used to take the gun and go off to the woods. The other, Yakov they called him, was sick all the time. Kept coughing. All three of us kept watch over that estate. And when spring came they said: "Farewell, grandad." And off they went. Set out for the west.

NATASHA: Were they escaped convicts?

LUKA: That's what they were. Escaped convicts. Escaped from the place where they were deported. Fine lads they were! If I hadn't taken pity on them, now, they might have killed me or done something else just as bad, and that would have meant a trial, and jail, and Siberia. What for? A jail can't teach a person what's right, and Siberia can't teach a person what's right, but a man—he can teach a person what's right, and very easy at that.

(*Pause.*)

BUBNOV: Hm. Take me, now—I'm no good at lying. Why lie? The way I see it, go ahead and speak the whole truth. What's there to be afraid of?

KLESHCH (*jumping up again as if stung and crying out*): The truth? What truth? (*Tearing at the rags that cover him.*) Here's the truth! No work. No strength. That's the truth! No shelter! Not even a roof of my own! Nothing left but to die like a dog! There's your truth for you, you old devil! What do I want with your truth? All I want's a chance to take a breath—to take a living breath! What wrong have I ever done? What do I want with your truth? I want a chance to live, god-damn it! They don't let you live, and there's your truth!

BUBNOV: Just see how the fellow's touched!

LUKA: Mother of God! But listen, my friend. You—

KLESHCH (*trembling with agitation*): All of you babbling about the truth! You, old man, trying to comfort

everybody! Well, I hate everybody, and that's the truth, may it be cursed and damned forever! Do you understand? It's high time you understood! To hell with your truth! (*Runs around the corner of the house, looking back and shouting.*)

LUKA: Dear, dear, dear! How upset the fellow is! Where has he gone?

NATASHA: He's gone off his chump.

BUBNOV: Very amusing. As good as play-acting. That happens every once in a while. He hasn't got used to life yet.

PEPEL (*entering slowly from behind the house*): Greetings, friends! Well, Luka, you sly old fox, still telling your fairy-tales?

LUKA: You should have heard how that man went off just now!

PEPEL: Who, Kleshch? What's wrong with him? I met him running as if the devil was after him.

LUKA: Anybody'd run if his heart was touched like that.

PEPEL (*sitting down*): I don't like the fellow. Too proud and vicious. (*Imitating Kleshch.*) "Me—I'm a working man!" As though that made him better than anybody else! Go ahead and work if you like it, but why be so proud of yourself? If a person's worth depended on how much work he did, a horse would be better than any human—goes on hauling day in and day out without a word. Natasha! Your folks at home?

NATASHA: They've gone to the cemetery. Then they intended to go to vespers.

PEPEL: So that's why you have nothing to do for a change!

LUKA (*turning thoughtfully to Bubnov*): The truth, you say? The truth doesn't always cure a person's ailments. You can't always help a soul with the truth. Once, for instance, there was a case like this: a certain man I knew believed in a true-righteous land.

BUBNOV: In a what?

LUKA: In a true-righteous land. "There ought to be," says he, "a true-righteous land in this world. And that land," thinks he, "must be inhabited by special people—good people, people who honour each other, and who in every little thing help each other. Everything," thinks he, "must be wonderfully fine in that land." And so he thought to go in search of the true-righteous land. He was a poor man and had a hard life. Sometimes things got so bad it looked as if there was nothing left for him to do but lie down and die. But he didn't give up. He would just smile to himself and say: "That's all right, I can bear it. I'll wait just a little longer and then I'll quit this life and go to the true-righteous land." That was his only joy in life—his faith in the true-righteous land.

PEPEL: Well, did he ever get there?

BUBNOV: Where? Ho-ho!

LUKA: And then to the village where he lived—this all happened in Siberia—they exiled a very learned man, with books, and charts, and all the things that go with a man of learning. And this poor man says to the man of learning, he says: "Be so kind as to tell me where this true-righteous land lies, and how to get there." Then and there the learned one gets out his books and opens up his charts and looks and looks, but he can't find the true-righteous land anywhere. Everything is in its place, all the lands are on the charts, but the true-righteous land is nowhere to be found!

PEPEL (*in a hushed voice*): Nowhere to be found?

(*Bubnov laughs.*)

NATASHA: Stop laughing. Go on, grandad.

LUKA: The man can't believe it. "It must be somewhere," says he. "Take a better look, because if there's no true-righteous land, then all your charts and books are of no account." The learned one doesn't like this.

"My charts," says he, "are the very best, but there's no such place as your true-righteous land." That makes the poor one furious. "What's that?" says he. "Here I've gone on living and bearing it all these years just because I was sure there was such a place, and now according to the charts it turns out there isn't any such place! A swindle, that's what it is!" And he says to the learned one: "You wretch! It's a rascal you are, and not a man of learning!" And he gives him a whack over the ear—bang! Then another one—bang! (*A moment's pause.*) And after that he goes home and hangs himself.

(*Everyone is silent. Luka, smiling, glances at Pepel and Natasha.*)

PEPEL (*under his breath*): The hell you say! A dreary sort of a story!

NATASHA: He couldn't stand being fooled.

BUBNOV (*sullenly*): Another fairy-tale.

PEPEL: Hm.... So it turns out there isn't any true-righteous land!

NATASHA: It's a pity about the man.

BUBNOV: All made up. Ho-ho! A true-righteous land! Spun out of his head. Ho-ho! (*Withdraws from the window.*)

LUKA (*nodding in the direction of Bubnov's window*): Laughing. Tck, tck, tck! (*Pause.*) Well, friends, I wish you well. I'll soon be on my way.

PEPEL: Where are you going?

LUKA: To the Ukraine. I heard as how they've opened up a new faith there and I want to look into it. People are always seeking, always wanting something better. May the Lord give them strength.

PEPEL: Do you think they'll ever find what they're looking for?

LUKA: Indeed I do. He who seeks always finds. He who wants a thing bad enough always gets it.

NATASHA: If only they would! If only they would think of a better way of life!

LUKA: They will. But we've got to help them, my dear. We've got to respect them for their seeking.

NATASHA: How can I help them? I need help myself.

PEPEL (*determinedly*): I'm going to speak to you again, Natasha. I'm going to ask you again. Here, in front of him, who knows everything. Come away with me.

NATASHA: Where shall we go? To jail?

PEPEL: I told you I'd give up stealing. I swear to heaven I'll give it up. And once I've said it, I'll do it. I know how to read and write. I'll work. He says we ought to go to Siberia of our own free will. Shall we? Do you think I don't hate this life? Oh, Natasha, I understand—I see it all. I console myself by saying that people who are called honest steal more than I do. But it doesn't help. That's not what I want. I don't regret anything, and I don't believe in a conscience. But there's one thing I do believe: this is no way to live. A man ought to live better. He ought to live so that he can respect himself.

LUKA: That's the thing, my lad! May the Lord help you! May Christ show you his mercy. That's the thing: a man has to respect himself.

PEPEL: From my earliest years I've been a thief. I've never been called anything but Vasya the thief; Vasya, the son of a thief. So that's what you think of me, is it? Very well, then that's what I'll be: a thief! See? Maybe it was just for spite I became a thief. Maybe I'm a thief just because nobody ever thought of calling me anything else. But you, Natasha? If you—?

NATASHA (*sadly*): Somehow I don't believe what anybody says. And I'm uneasy today. I have a sinking feeling, as if something was going to happen. You shouldn't have brought this up today, Vasya.

PEPEL: But when? This isn't the first time I've said it.

NATASHA: Why should I go with you? As for loving you—I can't say I love you so much. Sometimes I like you, and then again I just can't stand the sight of you. I don't suppose I love you. When you love a person you can't see the bad in him. But I see it in you.

PEPEL: Don't be afraid. I'll teach you to love me. You just say the word. I've had my eye on you for more than a year now, and I see you're a serious, upright girl, one who can be depended on. I've fallen hard for you, Natasha.

*(Vasilisa appears in the window in all her finery and stands listening, half-hidden by the window-frame.)*

NATASHA: You've fallen for me—and what about my sister?

PEPEL (*uneasy*): Well, what about her? There are lots like her.

LUKA: Don't you think about that, my dear. When there's no bread, a person'll eat grass.

PEPEL (*moodily*): Take pity on me. This is no life. A dog's life, with no joy in it. It's like living in a bog where everything you snatch at gives way because it's rotten. That sister of yours—I thought she was different. If she hadn't been so greedy for money I'd have done anything for her sake. If she'd been all mine. But she wanted something else—money. And a free rein. A free rein to live a wanton life. She couldn't help me. But you—you're like a young fir-tree that bends but doesn't break.

LUKA: Take my advice and marry him, my girl. He's not a bad chap. You just keep reminding him that he's good—don't let him forget it. He'll believe you. You just say to him over and over again: "You're a good man, Vasya, and don't you forget it." Think, my dear: what other way out is there for you? That sister of yours is a wicked beast. And as for her husband—the old man is

worse than any words can say, and so is this whole life here. What other way out is there? And he's a strong lad.

NATASHA: There's no other way out for me. I know. I've thought about it. Only—I don't believe anybody. But still, there's no other way out.

PEPEL: Yes, there is, but I won't let you take that path. I'd rather kill you.

NATASHA (*smiling*): I'm not your wife yet, but here you are ready to kill me.

PEPEL (*taking her in his arms*): Forget it, Natasha! That's how it's got to be.

NATASHA (*nestling against him*): I must tell you one thing, Vasya, and I swear it before God. The first time you lift your hand against me or do me any other wrong I'll not spare myself. I'll either kill myself or—

PEPEL: May my hand wither and drop off if ever I lift it against you!

LUKA: Don't worry, dearie, he needs you worse'n you do him.

VASILISA (*from the window*): So the match is made! From now on it's love, honour and obey!

NATASHA: They've come back! My God! They've seen us! Ah, Vasya!

PEPEL: What are you scared of? Nobody'll dare touch you now!

VASILISA: Don't worry, Natasha, he won't beat you. He can no more beat you than love you. I know!

LUKA (*under his breath*): That woman! A snake if there ever was one!

VASILISA: He just knows how to make pretty speeches.

KOSTYLYOV (*entering*): Natasha! What are you doing here, you lazy-bones? Spreading gossip? Complaining about your relatives? And you haven't got the samovar ready? Haven't set the table?

NATASHA (*going out*): But you intended going to church.

KOSTYLYOV: It's none of your business what we intended doing. See that you do what you're told to, what you're ordered to.

PEPEL: Hold your tongue! She's not a servant to you any more! Natasha, don't go! Don't do anything for them!

NATASHA: Don't tell me what I'm to do. Your time hasn't come yet! (*Goes out.*)

PEPEL (*to Kostylyov*): Leave her alone! You've had your way with her long enough. She's mine now.

KOSTYLYOV: Yours? When did you buy her? How much did you pay?

(*Vasilisa laughs.*)

LUKA: Go away, Vasya.

PEPEL: Take care, or you'll be laughing on the other side of your face!

VASILISA: Aren't I scared, just! Frightened to death!

LUKA: Go away, Vasya! Can't you see she's just egging you on, trying to get your dander up?

PEPEL: Ah.... Oh yes. She's lying. You're lying! You won't have things the way you want them!

VASILISA: And I won't have them the way I *don't* want them, Vasya!

PEPEL (*shaking his fist at her*): We'll see! (*He goes out.*)

VASILISA (*disappearing from the window*): I'll see you have a proper wedding!

KOSTYLYOV (*going over to Luka*): What are you doing here, old man?

LUKA: Nothing, old man.

KOSTYLYOV: They say you're going to leave us?

LUKA: High time.

KOSTYLYOV: Where are you going?

LUKA: To follow my nose.

KOSTYLYOV: Like the tramp you are. Makes you uneasy to stay in one place very long, eh?

LUKA: A rolling stone gathers no moss, as the saying goes.

KOSTYLYOV: That's said about a stone, but a person ought to settle in one place. People aren't supposed to live like roaches—scuttling here and there and everywhere. A person ought to make himself at home in some place and not be a stranger everywhere.

LUKA: And what if a person's at home everywhere?

KOSTYLYOV: That means he's a tramp and a useless creature. There has to be some use got out of a person. He ought to work.

LUKA: Think of that, now!

KOSTYLYOV: Yes, he ought. What's a stranger? A stranger's a strange person, one who isn't like others. If he's a pilgrim with knowledge—that is, if he's learned things—things nobody cares to know—not even if it's the truth he's learned, because—well, people don't always want to know the truth—let him keep it to himself. If he's a true pilgrim, he'll hold his tongue, or else talk so that nobody knows what he's talking about. And he shouldn't want to change things, or interfere in anything, or upset people to no good purpose. It's none of his business how people live. It's for him to lead a pious life. He ought to live in a cave in the forest where nobody can see him. He has no right to mix in people's affairs, trying to tell them what's right and what's wrong. But he ought to pray for everybody—for all our worldly sins—for yours and mine and everybody else's. That's why he renounces the vanities of this world—so he can pray. (*Pause.*) But you—what kind of a pilgrim are you? You haven't even got a passport. A respectable person ought to have a passport. All respectable human beings have got passports....

LUKA: Some of us are humans, some are just beings.

KOSTYLYOV: None of your cleverness, now. None of your riddles. I guess I'm as smart as you are. What's that you're saying—humans and beings?

LUKA: There's no riddle here. I'm just saying as there's barren soil, and there's fertile soil, and whatever you sow on fertile soil is bound to bear fruit. That's all.

KOSTYLYOV: Well, what of it?

LUKA: Take you, for example. If the Lord God himself should say to you: "Mikhail! Be a human!" it wouldn't make any difference at all. You'd just keep right on being what you are.

KOSTYLYOV: Hm. Listen, my wife's uncle, he's a policeman. If I—

VASILISA (*coming in*): Tea's ready, Mikhail Ivanovich.

KOSTYLYOV (*to Luka*): Get out of here. Don't let me catch you in my house again!

VASILISA: You'd better clear out, old man! You've got a long tongue. Who knows but what you're an escaped convict.

KOSTYLYOV: Get out of here this very day, or I'll—

LUKA: Call your uncle? Go ahead and call him. Tell him you've caught an escaped convict. Maybe the uncle will get a reward—three kopeks or so.

BUBNOV (*at the window*): Selling something? What's that for three kopeks?

LUKA: They're threatening to sell me.

VASILISA (*to her husband*): Come along.

BUBNOV: For three kopeks? Watch out, old man. They'll sell you for half a kopek!

KOSTYLYOV (*to Bubnov*): So you've crawled out? Like a goblin from under the stove. (*Goes out with his wife.*)

VASILISA: How many thieves and rascals there are in the world!

LUKA: May you enjoy your tea!

VASILISA (*turning around*): Hold your tongue, you shrivelled mushroom!

*(She and her husband disappear around the corner of the house.)*

LUKA: I'll be leaving tonight.

BUBNOV: That's good. It's always well to leave in good time.

LUKA: A truer word was never spoke.

BUBNOV: I know what I'm saying. I probably escaped jail by leaving in time.

LUKA: Did you, now?

BUBNOV: Yes, I did. Here's how it was: my wife got mixed up with a furrier, an able master—good at turning dog pelts into racoon. Cats, too—into kangaroos, or muskrats or anything else. A smart chap. It was with him my wife got mixed up, and they clung so tight to each other I had to look sharp so they didn't poison me or get rid of me in some other way. Sometimes I'd beat my wife; then the furrier'd beat me. He was a fierce fighter. Once he pulled half my beard out and broke a rib. I used to lose my temper, too. One day I lammed my wife over the head with an iron poker, and a big war was on. But I see nothing will come of it—they're sure to get me—so I makes up my mind to bump off the wife before she bumps off me. I had it all thought out, but I caught myself in time and went away.

LUKA: Good for you—leave them alone to turn cats into muskrats as much as they like.

BUBNOV: But the shop belonged to the wife, and I got left in the state you see me in now. Truth to tell, I'd have drunk up the shop. It's the drink that makes me—

LUKA: The drink, eh?

BUBNOV: I'm a ferocious drinker. Once I go on a jag, I drink up everything but my own hide. And I'm lazy. You wouldn't believe how I hate to work!

*(Satin and the Actor come in. They are arguing.)*

SATIN: Nonsense! You won't go, you know you won't. You're just fooling yourself. Old man! What twaddle have you been pouring into this fellow's ear?

ACTOR: That's a lie! Grandad, tell him he's lying. I *will* go. I worked today—swept the street. And I haven't had a single drink. Think of that! Here they are—my thirty kopeks, and I'm sober!

SATIN: Idiotic. Here, give me that money. I'll drink it up, or else lose it in a card game.

ACTOR: Hands off! That goes towards buying my ticket.

LUKA (*to Satin*): Why should you be wanting to set him off the right path?

SATIN: "Tell me, O wizard, beloved of the gods, just what is the fate that the future conceals?" I've been cleaned out, brother! Lost all I had! But there's still hope for the world, grandad; there's cleverer sharks than me left.

LUKA: You're a gay fellow, Konstantin, and a pleasant one.

BUBNOV: Actor! Come here!

(*The Actor goes over to the window and stoops down to talk to Bubnov in a low voice.*)

SATIN: I was amusing when I was young. Nice to recall those times. A rakish lad, I was. Danced superbly, acted on the stage, was always making people laugh. A charming young fellow.

LUKA: And how did you get switched off the track, eh?

SATIN: You're an inquisitive creature, old man. You'd like to know everything, wouldn't you? What for?

LUKA: I'd like to understand this human business. But when I look at you, I don't understand a thing. You're a good fellow, Konstantin, and a clever one, and yet—

SATIN: It was jail did it, grandad. I spent four years and seven months in jail, and nobody will have you after a jail sentence.

LUKA: Oho! And what were you put in jail for?

SATIN: For killing a rascal. I killed him in a burst of wrath and indignation. It was in jail I learned to play cards—and other things.

LUKA: Did you kill him on account of a woman?

SATIN: On account of my own sister. But don't you go prying. I don't like to be asked questions. And that all happened long, long ago. My sister died. Nine years ago. She was a lovely sister.

LUKA: You don't take life so hard. You should have heard that locksmith howl a while back! Ai-i-i!

SATIN: Kleshch?

LUKA: Him. "No work!" he shouted. "No nothing!"

SATIN: He'll get used to it in time. Well, what am I to do with myself now?

LUKA (*softly*): Look. Here he comes.

(*Kleshch comes in slowly, with hanging head.*)

SATIN: Hey, you widower! What've you got your nose between your knees for? What're you thinking about?

KLESHCH: I'm thinking about what I'm going to do. No tools. They all went for the funeral.

SATIN: Take my advice and don't do anything. Just be a burden to the world.

KLESHCH: It's all right for you to talk, but I have shame.

SATIN: Get rid of it. People aren't ashamed to have you lead a dog's life. Think it over. You stop working, I stop working, hundreds and thousands of others—everybody does the same. See? We all stop working. Nobody will raise a finger to do a thing! What will happen then?

KLESHCH: We'll all die of starvation.

LUKA (*to Satin*): You should join the Runaways, with such ideas. There's a kind of people called Runaways.*

SATIN: I know. They're not such fools, grandad.

(*From the window of the Kostylyovs' flat can be heard the cries of Natasha:* "Stop! Oh, stop! What have I done?")

* A religious sect.—*Tr.*

LUKA *(anxiously)*: Natasha? Is it her screaming like that?

*(From the Kostylyovs' flat comes a crashing of dishes, a murmur of voices, and the shrill cries of Kostylyov:* "You bitch! You whore!")

VASILISA: Stop! Wait! I'll show her! Take that! And that!

NATASHA: They're killing me! Killing me!

SATIN *(shouting at the window)*: Hey, you in there!

LUKA *(rushing hither and thither)*: Vasya! It's Vasya we want here! O Lord! Good people! Brothers!

ACTOR *(running off)*: Here, I'll go and get him.

BUBNOV: They beat her all the time now.

SATIN: Come, old man. We'll be witnesses.

LUKA *(following Satin)*: A poor sort of witness I make. That's not for me. It's Vasya we need, and need him quick.

NATASHA: Sister! Sister! Ah-h-h!

BUBNOV: They've gagged her. I'll go and have a look.

*(The commotion in the Kostylyovs' flat dies away as the people evidently move out into the hall. The old man is heard to cry* "Stop!" *A door slams, and this chops off the noise like the blow of an axe. Silence on the stage. Spring twilight. Kleshch is sitting on the overturned sledge with an air of detachment, rubbing his hands tensely. He mutters something unintelligible which focuses into the following lines:* "But how? A man's got to live, hasn't he?" [*In a loud voice*]: "A roof! I need a roof over my head! I haven't got a roof! I haven't got anything! A man's alone—all alone. That's where the trouble lies. No one to help him." *He goes off slowly, all bent over. An ominous silence reigns for a few seconds. Then from off stage comes a vague murmur which grows into chaotic sound as it draws nearer. Separate voices can be distinguished.*)

VASILISA: I'm her sister! Let me at her!

KOSTYLYOV: You have no right.

VASILISA: Jail-bird!

SATIN: Call Vasya! Hurry! Beat him, Zob!

(*A police whistle blows.*)

TATAR (*running on, his right arm in a sling*): What kind of law—to kill in day-time.

KRIVOI ZOB (*followed by Medvedev*): Hah! I gave him a good one!

MEDVEDEV: You—how dare you fight?

TATAR: And you? What duty you have?

MEDVEDEV (*running after the Tatar*): Stop! Give me back my whistle!

KOSTYLYOV (*running on*): Abram! Seize him! He killed—

(*From behind the corner come Kvashnya and Nastya supporting the dishevelled Natasha between them. Satin walks backward, pushing off Vasilisa who is trying to get at her sister. Alyoshka leaps about her like an imp, whistling in her ear, shouting, howling. They are followed by a small and ragged crowd.*)

SATIN (*to Vasilisa*): What's the idea, you damned slut?

VASILISA: Get away, jail-bird! It may cost me my life, but I'll tear her to pieces!

KVASHNYA (*leading Natasha away*): Enough, Vasilisa! Have some shame! You're behaving like a brute.

MEDVEDEV (*seizing Satin*): Here you are! Caught at last!

SATIN: Lam into them, Zob. Vasya! Vasya!

(*They gather in a crowd near the passage between the brick wall and the house. Natasha is led over and seated on the pile of boards to the right.*)

PEPEL (*coming suddenly through the passage and silently pushing everybody aside with strong vigorous movements*): Where's Natasha? You—

KOSTYLYOV (*hiding behind the house*): Abram! Catch Vasya! Brothers, help catch Vasya! Thief! Robber!

PEPEL: You old fornicator!

(*With a great sweep of his arm he strikes the old man, who falls in such a way that only his head and shoulders can be seen from behind the corner of the house. Pepel rushes over to Natasha.*)

VASILISA: Thrash Vasya, fellows! Thrash the thief!

MEDVEDEV (*shouting to Satin*): Keep out of this! It's a family affair! They're all relatives! You don't belong here!

PEPEL: What is it? What has she done, stabbed you?

KVASHNYA: Just look what the brutes have done! Scalded her legs with boiling water!

NASTYA: Upset the samovar on her!

TATAR: Maybe accident. Have to know for sure. Mustn't make mistake.

NATASHA (*almost fainting*): Vasya, take me away. Hide me.

VASILISA: My God! Look here! He's dead! Killed!

(*Everyone rushes to the passage where Kostylyov is lying. Bubnov separates himself from the crowd and goes over to Vasya Pepel.*)

BUBNOV (*in a low voice*): Vasya! The old man—he's done for.

PEPEL (*looks at him without comprehending*): Call an ambulance. We'll have to take her to the hospital. I'll get even with them for this!

BUBNOV: I'm saying that somebody's finished off the old man.

*(The noise on the stage goes out like a fire flooded with water. Separate remarks are passed in hushed tones:* "Really?" "That's bad." "Hm." "Let's get away from here." "What the hell!" "Watch out!" "Beat it before the police come." *The crowd dwindles. Bubnov, the Tatar, Nastya and Kvashnya rush over to the body of Kostylyov.)*

VASILISA (*rising from the ground and crying triumphantly*): Murdered! There's the one who murdered my husband! Vasya did it! I saw it myself! I saw it, friends! Well, Vasya? So the police are coming for you?

PEPEL (*leaving Natasha's side*): Let me pass. Out of my way! (*Takes a look at the old man, then turns to Vasilisa.*) Well, are you satisfied? (*Touches the body with his foot.*) Done for, the cur. So you got what you wanted. Humph! Maybe I ought to bump you off too. (*Throws himself at her. Satin and Krivoi Zob quickly intercede. Vasilisa runs into the passage.*)

SATIN: Think what you're doing!

KRIVOI ZOB: Take your time!

VASILISA (*reappearing*): Well, friend Vasya, there's no escaping your fate. The police! Abram, blow your whistle!

MEDVEDEV: The devils snatched my whistle away.

ALYOSHKA: Here it is! (*He gives a blow. Medvedev runs after him.*)

SATIN (*leading Pepel over to Natasha*): Don't let it trouble you, Vasya. You killed him in a fight. That's nothing. That won't cost you dear.

VASILISA: Hold Vasya! He killed him! I saw him do it!

SATIN: I had a whack at him three or four times myself. It didn't take much to finish him off. I'll be a witness, Vasya.

PEPEL: I don't want to slip out of it. I want to drag Vasilisa into it. And I will, so help me God! That's what she wanted. She talked me into killing her husband. She talked me into it.

NATASHA (*suddenly, in a loud voice*): Ah!... Now I see! So that's how it is, Vasya! Oh, good people, they did it together! They planned it all! Very well, Vasya! So that's why you talked to me tonight? So she could hear? Good people, she lives with him. You all know that. Everybody knows it. They did it together. She—she talked him into killing her husband. He stood in their way. And I stood in their way. That's why they've made a cripple of me.

PEPEL: Natasha! What are you talking about!

SATIN: Hm, devil take it!

VASILISA: Liar! She's lying! I—he's the one! Vasya killed him!

NATASHA: They did it together! Curse you! Both of you!

SATIN: It's a game. Watch out, Vasya! They'll have a rope round your neck before you know it!

KRIVOI ZOB: Can't make head or tail out of it! A fine business!

PEPEL: Natasha! Do you really.... Are you serious?... How can you think that I ... with her....

SATIN: Think what you're saying, Natasha!

VASILISA (*from the passage*): They've murdered my husband, sir. Vasya Pepel, the thief—he did it. I saw him, Inspector. Everybody saw him.

NATASHA (*tossing about in a half-conscious state*): Good people, it was my sister and Vasya Pepel who did it! Listen to me, Inspector. It was my sister—she showed him how. She talked him into it. He's her lover. There he is, damn his soul! They killed him! Take them both. Take them to jail! And take me, too! Put me in jail! For the love of Christ, put me in jail!

CURTAIN

## ACT IV

*The scene is the same as in Act I, except that the partition which once formed Pepel's room has been taken down and Kleshch's anvil is gone. The Tatar tosses and moans on a bunk in the corner which was Pepel's room. Kleshch sits at the table repairing an accordion, occasionally trying the keys. At the other end of the table Satin, the Baron and Nastya are sitting. There is a bottle of vodka, three bottles of beer and some black bread in front of them. The Actor is moving about and coughing on top of the stove. Night. The stage is lighted by a lamp standing in the centre of the table. The wind is blowing outside.*

KLESHCH: He disappeared in all the hubbub.

BARON: Separated himself from the police like smoke from fire.

SATIN: Like the sinful from the righteous.

NASTYA: He was a good old man. But you—you're not humans. You're dung!

BARON (*drinking*): To your health, my fine lady!

SATIN: A queer bird. Nastya, here, she fell in love with him.

NASTYA: Yes, I fell in love with him. That's the truth. He saw everything and understood everything.

SATIN (*laughing*): He was like mush for the toothless.

BARON (*laughing*): Like a plaster for boils.

KLESHCH: He had pity, but you—you don't know what pity is.

SATIN: What good would my pity do you?

KLESHCH: I don't mean you. You do, well, not exactly pity folk, but at least spare their feelings.

TATAR (*sitting down on one of the bunks and rocking his sore arm like a baby*): He was good old man. He know law of soul. Who know law of soul—he good. Who lost law—he lost himself.

BARON: What law, Asan?

TATAR: Different law. You know what.

BARON: Next!

TATAR: Don't hurt people. That's law.

SATIN: That's called: "Penal Code for Criminals and Miscreants."

BARON: And then there's that "Statutes of Penalties Imposed by Justices of the Peace."

TATAR: Koran is law. Your Koran also law. Every soul must have Koran, yes!

KLESHCH (*trying out the accordion*): Wheezes, damn it! What the Tatar says is right. People ought to live according to the law. According to the Bible.

SATIN: Why don't you?

BARON: Just try it.

TATAR: Mohammed gave Koran, Mohammed said: here—the law! Do what it say here. Then come time—Koran too little. New time, new law. Every new time give new law.

SATIN: Right you are. Now the time's come for the "Penal Code." A good strong law. It'll take a lot of time to wear out that law.

NASTYA (*banging a glass on the table*): Why, oh why should I go on living here with you all? I'll go away—anywhere—to the ends of the earth!

BARON: Barefoot, my fine lady?

NASTYA: Naked! Crawling on all fours!

BARON: A sight for sore eyes, my fine lady! Fancy that! On all fours!

NASTYA: That's how I'll go. I'll go any way at all, just to get rid of the sight of you. If you only knew how sick I am of everything! Of everybody and everything!

SATIN: Take the Actor with you when you go. He's planning the same trip He just found out that half a mile from the end of the earth there's a hospital for organons.

ACTOR (*thrusting his head over the edge of the bunk on top of the stove*): Organisms, fool!

SATIN: For organons poisoned by alcohol.

ACTOR: Oh, he's going, have no fear. He's going! You'll see!

BARON: Just who is he, my good sir?

ACTOR: Me!

BARON: Merci, votary of the goddess—what's her name? Goddess of the drama, tragedy. What d'you call her?

ACTOR: Muse, you dolt! She's not a goddess, but a muse!

SATIN: Lachesis? Hera? Aphrodite? Atropos? The devil only knows which. It's all the doings of that old man, Baron. He got the Actor all stirred up.

BARON: The old man's crazy.

ACTOR: Ignoramuses! Barbarians! Mel-po-me-ne! Oh, he'll go away, you can be sure of that! Heartless creatures! "Gorge yourselves, benighted minds!..." That's from Béranger. He'll find a place for himself where there is no... no....

BARON: No nothing, my good sir.

ACTOR: That's it. No nothing. "That yawning hole shall

be my grave. This wasted frame, no hand can save." And why should *you* go on living? Why, oh why?

BARON: Hey you—"Edmund Kean, or Genius and Dissipation." Stop shouting!

ACTOR: I'll shout all I want to!

NASTYA (*raising her head from the table and waving her hands*): Go on shouting. Make them listen.

BARON: What's the sense of it, my fine lady?

SATIN: Leave them alone, Baron! To hell with them! Let them yell! They'll split their heads open. The important thing is: don't interfere with people, as the old man said. It was him, like a cake of yeast, put the ferment in our fellow lodgers.

KLESHCH: He lured them to enchanting places, then slipped away without showing them the road.

BARON: The old man was a faker.

NASTYA: You're a faker yourself!

BARON: Shut up, my fine lady!

KLESHCH: As for the truth—the old man had no use for it. He was very set against the truth, and so he should be. When you come to think of it, what talk of truth can there be? Life's hard enough without it. Take the Tatar here—got his arm smashed at work and now he'll have to chop it off. There's your truth for you!

SATIN (*pounding on the table*): Silence! You're a lot of cattle! Blockheads! Shut up about the old man! (*More calmly.*) And you're the worst of them, Baron. You don't understand anything. And you lie. The old man wasn't a faker. What is the truth? Man!—that's the truth. He knew this, but you don't. Your heads are like bricks. I understand him. Of course he lied, but he did it out of pity for you, devil take you! Lots of people lie out of pity for their brothers. I know. I've read books. They lie beautifully, with inspiration, stirring you up. There are lies that console, that reconcile a person to his lot. Lies

find an excuse for the weight that smashed the worker's arm; lies blame a man for starving to death. I know your lies! Only those who are faint-hearted or live at other people's expense have need of lies. Some people are supported by lies, others hide behind them. But the person who is his own boss—the person who is independent and doesn't suck other people's blood—what need has he of lies? Lies are the religion of slaves and bosses! Truth is the god of the free man!

BARON: Bravo! Well said! I agree with everything you say! You talk like . . . like a respectable gentleman.

SATIN: Why shouldn't a cheat sometimes talk like a respectable gentleman, if your respectable gentlemen so often talk like cheats? There are lots of things I've forgotten, but I still remember a thing or two. That old man was a smart fellow. He acted on me like acid on an old, dirty coin. Let's drink to his health! Fill my glass.

(*Nastya fills Satin's glass with beer and hands it to him.*)

SATIN (*with a short laugh*): The old man lives by his own wits. He sees everything with his own eyes. One day I said to him, "Grandad, what do people live for?" (*Imitating the voice and manners of Luka.*) "They live to make life better, my friend. Now, for instance, let's say we have some carpenters—junk, all of them. And then from among them is born one carpenter—a carpenter the likes of whom the earth has never seen; outshines all the others, he does, and none can even hold a candle to him. On all carpentering he leaves his own mark, so that the craft moves forward twenty years in one jump. The same it is with all the others—tinsmiths, cobblers, all the working folk, and all the peasants too—and even the gentlefolk. All of them live to make life better. Each thinking it's for himself he's living, but really he lives to make life better. For a hundred years

they live—maybe even for more, and all to make life better."

*(Nastya looks intently at Satin. Kleshch, too, stops working on the accordion and listens. The Baron drops his head on his chest and softly drums on the table. The Actor quietly lets himself down off the stove on to one of the bunks.)*

SATIN: "All of them, my good friend, every last one of them, lives to make life better," says the old man. We ought to be considerate of one another. For you see, it's not for us to know who a person is, and why he was born, and what he can do. Maybe he was born for our good fortune, to be some great help to us. And particular it's the children we must respect—the little ones. It's freedom they need, the little ones. We mustn't interfere with them; we must be considerate of them."

*(Laughs softly. Pause.)*

BARON *(meditatively)*: Hm. To make life better? That reminds me of my family—an old family, dating back to Catherine the Great. Nobles. Warriors. Came from France. Served the tsar and kept climbing up and up. During the reign of Nikolai I, my grandfather, Gustave Débile, held high office. Wealth, hundreds of serfs, horses, servants—

NASTYA: Liar! That's all bunk!

BARON *(jumping up)*: Wha-at!?

NASTYA: That's all humbug!

BARON *(shouting)*: A mansion in Moscow! A mansion in St. Petersburg! Carriages with our coat of arms on them!

*(Kleshch takes up his accordion and walks off to one side, from where he observes the scene.)*

NASTYA: Claptrap!

BARON: Shut up! Dozens of lackeys, I'm telling you!

NASTYA (*enjoying it*): Poppycock!

BARON: I'll kill you!

NASTYA (*about to run away*): You never had a carriage!

SATIN: Drop it, Nastya! Don't make him mad.

BARON: Just wait, you scum! My grandfather—

NASTYA: You never had a grandfather! You never had anything!

(*Satin laughs.*)

BARON (*sinks down on a bench, weak with fury*): Satin, tell her—that bitch—or are you laughing too? Don't you believe it either? (*Shouting in despair, banging the table with his fists.*) It's all true, god-damn you!

NASTYA (*triumphantly*): Aha! Howling! See what it's like when nobody believes you?

KLESHCH (*returning to the table*): I was sure there'd be a fight.

TATAR: Ah, stupid people! Very bad!

BARON: I... I won't have people making fun of me! I have... I can prove it. I have papers, you devils!

SATIN: Forget them! And forget about your grandfather's carriages. They won't get you very far, those bygone carriages.

BARON: How dares she!

NASTYA (*mockingly*): Hear that? How dares she!

SATIN: Well, she does. And why is she any worse than you are? Even if she never had any carriages, or grandfathers, or even a mother and father.

BARON (*more composed*): Devil take you! You always take things calmly. I'm afraid I have no character.

SATIN: Get one. It'll come in handy. (*Pause.*) Nastya, do you ever go to the hospital?

NASTYA: What for?

SATIN: To see Natasha.

NASTYA: A little late, aren't you? She left the hospital long ago. Left it and disappeared. Gone without leaving a trace.

SATIN: That means—all gone.

KLESHCH: I wonder who'll give it to the other harder: Vasya to Vasilisa, or the other way round.

NASTYA: Vasilisa will wriggle out of it somehow. She's foxy. But they'll send Vasya to hard labour in Siberia.

SATIN: Oh no, he'll only get jail for killing in a fight.

NASTYA: Too bad. They ought to send him away—to send all of you away. Sweep you out like garbage. Throw you on some dump.

SATIN (*surprised*): What's that you're saying? Have you gone clean off your chump?

BARON: I'll give her a smack on the ear. What nerve!

NASTYA: Go ahead and try. Just touch me!

BARON: I ll try it, never fear!

SATIN: Stop it! Don't touch her. You mustn't hurt people. I can't get that old man out of my head. (*Laughs.*) You mustn't hurt people! But what if they hurt me—hurt me so bad I'll never get over it? What then? Am I supposed to forgive them? Never! Nobody!

BARON (*to Nastya*): Don't forget you're not my equal! You're . . . you're the scum of the earth!

NASTYA: Ugh, you louse! You live on me like a worm on an apple.

(*Burst of laughter from the men.*)

KLESHCH: You little fool! An apple!

BARON: How can anybody get mad at her? She's an idiot.

NASTYA: Laughing, are you? Fooling yourself. You don't really think it's funny.

ACTOR (*sullenly*): Give it to them!

NASTYA: If only I could! I'd . . . I'd. . . . (*Picks up a cup and smashes it on the floor.*) That's what I'd do to you!

TATAR: Why break dishes? Eh . . . bad woman!

BARON (*getting up*): Now I'll teach her some manners!

NASTYA (*running toward the door*): You can go to hell!

SATIN (*calling after her*): Enough of this! Who are you scaring? What's it all about, anyway?

NASTYA: Wolves! I hope you choke! Wolves!

ACTOR (*sullenly*): Amen!

TATAR: O-o-o! Bad woman—Russian woman. Nervy. Too free. Tatar woman not like that. Tatar woman knows law.

KLESHCH: She needs a good shaking.

BARON: The slut!

KLESHCH (*trying out the accordion*): Good. But the lad doesn't come for it. He's going to the dogs fast.

SATIN: Here, have a drink.

KLESHCH: Thanks. Time to turn in.

SATIN: Getting used to us?

KLESHCH (*drinks, then goes over to a bunk in the corner*): I suppose so. It turns out there are human beings everywhere. At first you don't notice it, then you have a better look and there they are—human beings.

(*The Tatar spreads a cloth of some sort on his bed, kneels on it and begins to pray.*)

BARON (*pointing to the Tatar and speaking to Satin*): Look at that.

SATIN: Leave him alone. He's a good fellow. Don't disturb him. (*Laughs.*) Why should I be feeling so kind-hearted today?

BARON: You always get kind-hearted when you've had a drink—and clever, too.

SATIN: When I'm drunk everything looks rosy. He's praying? Fine. A person can be a believer or not, just as he pleases. That's his business. A person's free to choose. He pays for everything himself: for believing, for not believing, for loving, for being clever. A person

pays for everything himself, and that's why he's free. Man—there's your truth! What's a man? Not you, nor me, nor him. Oh no! But you and me and him and the old man, and Napoleon, and Mohammed—all in one! (*Drawing the figure of a man in the air.*) Comprehend? That's tremendous! It includes all beginnings and all endings. All things are part of Man; all things are for Man. Only Man exists; the rest is merely the work of his hands and his mind. How marvellous is Man! How proud the word rings—MAN! A man should be respected. Not pitied—pity is degrading. Respected! Baron, let's drink to Man! (*Stands up.*) How good to feel oneself a Man! Here am I—ex-convict, murderer, card-sharper—all of that! When I go down the street people take me for a thief. They step aside and steal furtive glances at me. Often they call me a rascal, a faker! Work, they say! Work? What for? To fill my belly? (*Laughs.*) I've always despised people who think too much about their bellies. The belly isn't the main thing, Baron. Indeed it isn't. Man is superior to that. Man is superior to his belly!

BARON (*shaking his head*): Good for you—thinking things out like this. It must warm your heart. As for me—I can't. I don't know how. (*Glancing about and speaking under his breath.*) Sometimes I'm afraid. Understand? Scared. I keep thinking—what'll happen next?

SATIN (*walking up and down*): Nonsense! What should a man fear?

BARON: As long as I can remember there's been a sort of fog in my head. I never could understand anything. I ... it's strange, but ... it seems to me I've just been changing my clothes all my life. What for? Can't make it out. First I was a student—wore the uniform of the Institute for Sons of the Nobility. What did they teach me there? Can't remember. Got married. Put on a dress suit, then a dressing-gown. But the wife I chose was a bad one. Why did I marry her? Can't remember. I

squandered all my means—wore some kind of a grey jacket and faded pants. How did I lose everything? Can't remember. Worked in a government office—uniform again, cap with a badge on it. Embezzled government money. They put me in convict clothes. After that I donned these rags. And that's all. Like in a dream, isn't it? It's even funny.

SATIN: Not very. More stupid than funny.

BARON: It is. I, too, think it's stupid. After all, I must have been born for something.

SATIN (*with a short laugh*): You must have. "Man is born to make life better!" (*Nodding his head.*) Good words.

BARON: Drat that Nastya! Where did she run off to? I'll go and have a look. After all, she's—(*Goes out. Pause.*)

ACTOR: Tatar! (*Pause.*) Asan!

(*The Tatar turns his head.*)

ACTOR: Pray for me.

TATAR: What?

ACTOR (*softly*): Say a prayer for me.

TATAR (*after a pause*): Say your own prayers.

ACTOR (*quickly climbs down off the stove, goes over to the table, pours himself out a glass of vodka with shaking hands, swallows it down, almost runs out into the passage*): I'm off!

SATIN: Hey, you! Sicambri! Where are you going?

(*Whistles. Bubnov and Medvedev come in, the latter wearing a woman's quilted jacket. Both are slightly drunk. In one hand Bubnov is carrying a string of pretzels, in the other a couple of smoked fish. One bottle of vodka is thrust under his arm, another sticks out of the pocket of his coat.*)

MEDVEDEV: A camel is something like a donkey, only without ears.

BUBNOV: You're something like a donkey yourself.

MEDVEDEV: A camel doesn't have any ears at all. He hears with his nose.

BUBNOV (*to Satin*): So here you are, friend! I searched the pubs for you. Take this bottle. All my hands are busy.

SATIN: Put those pretzels on the table and one of your hands will be free.

BUBNOV: Quite right. Just look at him. He's a smart fellow, ain't he?

MEDVEDEV: All cheats are smart. I know! They couldn't get on if they weren't. A good fellow can be stupid, but a bad fellow has got to be smart. But about that camel, you're all wrong. It's a beast of burden. No horns, no teeth—

BUBNOV: Where's everybody? How is it nobody's here? Hey, crawl out! The treat's on me! Who's that in the corner?

SATIN: How long will it take you to drink up your last kopek, you old scarecrow?

BUBNOV: Not long. This time the capital I saved up wasn't very big. Zob! Where's Zob?

KLESHCH (*coming over to the table*): He's gone.

BUBNOV: Gr-r-r-r! You bulldog, you! Grrr! Woof! Woof! No barking! No grumbling! Drink, you dunce. Don't stand there hanging your head! I'm treating tonight! And how I love it! If I was rich, I'd open up a pub and serve drinks free of charge! Honest to God! With music and a chorus for sure. Come on in, everybody! Eat, drink, and listen to the songs for your soul's ease! No money? Here you are—a free pub! As for you, Satin, I'd.... I'd give you half my money besides! That's what I'd do!

SATIN: Give me all of it—this very minute!

BUBNOV: Everything I have? This very minute? Hah! Here you are—a ruble . . . another . . . twenty kopeks . . . chicken feed. . . .

SATIN: That's enough. It'll be safer with me. I'll gamble with it.

MEDVEDEV: I'm a witness that the money was given out for safe keeping. How much?

BUBNOV: You? You're a camel. We don't need witnesses.

ALYOSHKA (*enters barefoot*): Fellows! I got my feet wet!

BUBNOV: Come on and get your throat wet! That's all you need. Your singing and playing is all very good, my lad. But your drinking—that's no good. That's harmful, brother. Drinking's harmful.

ALYOSHKA: You're a good example. The only time you're at all like a human being is when you're drunk. Kleshch! Is my accordion ready? (*Sings and dances.*)

Oh, if I had a mug,
As ugly as a bug,
My lady fair
Would give me the air!

I'm cold, brothers. I'm fro-o-zen!

MEDVEDEV: Hm. . . . May I ask who your lady fair is?

BUBNOV: Leave him alone. Mind your own business. You're not a policeman now—not a policeman and not an uncle.

ALYOSHKA: You're just the aunt's husband.

BUBNOV: One of your nieces is in jail, the other is dying.

MEDVEDEV (*proudly*): That's a lie. She's not dying. She simply disappeared.

(*Satin laughs.*)

BUBNOV: What difference does it make? Once you've lost your nieces, you're no longer an uncle.

ALYOSHKA: Your Excellency! Retired drummer-boy to the goat!

The dame—she's got money,
And me—I'm dead broke,
But still I'm a jolly,
A marvellous bloke!

It's damned cold in here.

(*Krivoi Zob comes in. Throughout the rest of the act other figures of men and women drift in. They take their things off and lie down grumbling on the bunks.*)

KRIVOI ZOB: What did you run away for, Bubnov?

BUBNOV: Come here. Sit down and let's have a song. My favourite, eh?

TATAR: Must sleep night-time. Sing songs day-time.

SATIN: That's all right, Asan. Come over here.

TATAR: What you mean, that's all right? Make noise. Make big noise when you sing songs.

BUBNOV (*going over to him*): How's the arm, Asan? Did they cut it off?

TATAR: What for? Wait. Maybe don't cut it off. Arm isn't old iron. Cut it off easy when time come.

KRIVOI ZOB: You're done for, Asan. No good for anything with one arm. People like us are worth as much as our arms and our backs, brother. No arm, no man. Done for. Come on, have a drink and forget it!

KVASHNYA (*coming in*): Hullo, dearies! What weather! Cold and slush! Is my policeman here?

MEDVEDEV: Here I am!

KVASHNYA: There! You've taken my jacket again! And it looks as if you'd had a nip or two, eh? What do you mean by it?

MEDVEDEV: On the occasion of Bubnov's birthday ... and the cold ... and the slush....

KVASHNYA: Watch your step! The slush! None of your monkey business! Come to bed!

MEDVEDEV (*going into the kitchen*): I really could sleep. It's high time.

SATIN: Aren't you pretty strict with him?

KVASHNYA: That's the only way, friend. You've got to keep a tight hold on a man like him. When I took him in to live with me, I thinks to myself: I may get some good out of him, seeings as he's on the force and you're all such a bunch of rowdies and I'm a poor defenceless woman. But he starts drinking straight off. I can't be having a thing like that!

SATIN: You picked a poor helpmate.

KVASHNYA: There aren't any better ones. You wouldn't live with me—such a swell you are! And even if you did, it wouldn't last more than a week. And you'd gamble me away in no time—me and all my claptrap.

SATIN (*laughing*): Right you are, woman. I'd gamble you away for sure.

KVASHNYA: See? Alyoshka!

ALYOSHKA: Here I am.

KVASHNYA: What's this gossip you've been spreading about me?

ALYOSHKA: Only the truth. There's a woman for you, I says! Simply a marvel! Ten poods of fat, bones, and muscle, and not an ounce of brains!

KVASHNYA: That's a lie now. I've got a very lot of

brains. But why did you say I beat that policeman of mine?

ALYOSHKA: I thought you gave him a beating that time you dragged him off by the hair.

KVASHNYA (*laughing*): Fool! You ought to pretend not to see. Why hang out your dirty clothes for everybody to gape at? And besides, you've hurt his feelings. He's took to drink because of your gossip.

ALYOSHKA: Proof of the saying: even a chicken drinks.

(*Satin and Kleshch laugh.*)

KVASHNYA: Ooh, what a tongue you've got! What sort of a person are you anyway, Alyoshka?

ALYOSHKA: The best in the world! I try my hand at anything, and follow my nose wherever it goes!

BUBNOV (*beside the Tatar's bunk*): Come on! We won't give you a chance to sleep anyway! We're going to sing all night long! Zob!

KRIVOI ZOB: Sing? Why not?

ALYOSHKA: And I'll accompany you.

SATIN: We'll see how.

TATAR (*smiling*): Well, shaitan Bubno, bring some wine. We drink. We have good time. We die, once upon time.

BUBNOV: Fill up his glass, Satin! Sit down, Zob! It's not much a fellow needs, friends. Here am I with a drink in me and happy as a lord! Zob, start up the song—you know, my favourite! I'm going to sing—and bawl my eyes out.

KRIVOI ZOB (*singing*):

Every morn the sun arises....

BUBNOV (*joining in*):

Still my cell is filled with gloom....

(*Suddenly the door bursts open.*)

BARON (*shouting from the doorway*): Hey, folks! Come here! Come quick! The Actor has hung himself! Out in the vacant lot!

(*Silence. All look at the Baron. Nastya appears from behind him and walks slowly, wide-eyed, towards the table.*)

SATIN (*softly*): Tck! Spoiled the song, the fool!

CURTAIN

# SUMMER FOLK

(SCENES)

## CHARACTERS

BASOV, SERGEI VASILYEVICH, *40 years old, a lawyer*
VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA, *27 years old, his wife*
KALERIA, *29 years old, Basov's sister*
VLAS, *25 years old, Varvara's brother*
SUSLOV, PYOTR IVANOVICH, *42 years old, an engineer*
YULIA FILIPPOVNA, *30 years old, his wife*
DUDAKOV, KIRILL AKIMOVICH, *40 years old, a doctor*
OLGA ALEXEYEVNA, *35 years old, his wife*
SHALIMOV, YAKOV PETROVICH, *40 years old, a writer*
RYUMIN, PAVEL SERGEYEVICH, *32 years old*
MARIA LVOVNA, *37 years old, a doctor*
SONYA, *18 years old, her daughter*
DVOYETOCHIYE, SEMYON SEMYONOVICH, *55 years old, Suslov's uncle*
ZAMYSLOV, NIKOLAI PETROVICH, *28 years old, Basov's assistant*
ZIMIN, *23 years old, a student*
PUSTOBAIKA, *50 years old, a night watchman*
KROPILKIN, *another night watchman*

| | |
|---|---|
| Sasha, *the Basovs' serving-girl* | |
| Woman with a Tied-up Face | *Amateur actors* |
| Semyonov | |
| Woman in Yellow | |
| Young Man in a Checked Suit | |
| Young Lady in Blue | |
| Young Lady in Pink | |
| A Cadet | |
| Man in a Top Hat | |

## ACT I

*A house in the country which has been taken for the summer by the Basovs. A large room, serving as dining and sitting room. There are three doors in the back wall. The one on the left is open and gives a glimpse into Basov's study. The one on the right is to Varvara Mikhailovna's room. The centre door leads into the hall, and is hung with dark portieres. In the right wall, one window and a wide door leading out on to a verandah; in the left wall, two windows. There is a big table in the centre of the room and a grand piano opposite the door of the study. The rest of the furniture (except for a large sofa with a grey cover on it, which stands near the hall door) is made of wicker. It is evening. Basov is in his study, sitting at the writing-desk, which is lighted by a lamp with a green shade. We see him in profile. He hums to himself from time to time as he writes, and keeps glancing into the darkness of the big room. Varvara Mikhailovna comes noiselessly out of her room and strikes a match, which she holds up in front of her face as she looks about. The match goes out. She walks softly over to the window in the darkness and stumbles over a chair.*

BASOV: Who's that?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Me.

BASOV: Uh.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Did you take the candle?

BASOV: No.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Ring for Sasha.

BASOV: Has Vlas come?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*at the door of the verandah*): I don't know.

BASOV: A crazy house. Electric bells all over the place, but the walls are full of chinks and the floor creaks. (*Hums something cheerful.*) Still there, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Yes.

BASOV (*putting his papers away*): Are there draughts in your room too?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: There are.

BASOV: I thought so.

(*Enter Sasha.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Bring a light, Sasha.

BASOV: Sasha, has Vlas Mikhailovich come?

SASHA: Not yet.

(*Sasha goes out, comes back with a lamp which she puts on a table next to an armchair. She empties an ash-tray and straightens the cloth on the big table. Varvara Mikhailovna pulls the curtains, takes a book off a shelf and sits down in the armchair.*)

BASOV (*good-naturedly*): Vlas has become very careless of late. And lazy. I can't make him out, that's a fact.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Will you have tea?

BASOV: No, I'm going to the Suslovs.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Sasha, run over to Olga Alexeyevna's and ask her to come and have tea with me.

(*Sasha goes out.*)

BASOV (*locking away his papers*): So that's that. (*Comes out of his study stretching himself.*) I wish you'd tell him that for me, Varya—tactfully, of course.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Tell him what?

BASOV: That he ought to... er... be more conscientious about his work.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I will. But I don't think you ought to speak about him in that tone in front of Sasha.

BASOV (*examining the room*): Oh, it doesn't matter. There's no hiding anything from the servants. It's sort of—sort of bare in here, Varya. You might hang something on those walls—some frames. And pictures. Make it cosier. Well, I'm off. Your hand, ducky. You're very chilly and untalkative. Why is that? And what makes you look so glum?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Are you in a great hurry to get to the Suslovs?

BASOV: Yes, I must run along. Haven't had a game of chess with him for ages—or kissed your hand, either. Strange. I wonder why.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*hiding a smile*): And so we'll put off discussing me until you're not so busy. It's not of any particular importance, I suppose.

BASOV (*placatingly*): I'm sure it isn't. Couldn't be serious—I don't know why I mentioned it. You're the perfect wife—clever, sincere, and all the rest. Fact. If you had a grudge against me you'd tell me, wouldn't you? What makes your eyes so glittery? Aren't you feeling well?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Oh, I'm all right.

BASOV: You want to find something to keep you busy, dear. You read too much—always reading, and any overindulgence is harmful, don't forget.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Don't *you* forget when you and Suslov are tippling.

BASOV (*laughing*): A nasty dig! But to tell you the truth, these spicy modern books are more harmful than

wine. Like taking narcotics. And the gentlemen who write them are a set of neurotics. (*Yawning.*) Very soon we are to be visited by what the children would call an "honest-to-goodness" writer. I wonder what he's like now. Probably conceited. All these chaps who get into the limelight are painfully conceited. Not normal. Take Kaleria—she's not normal either, although you could hardly call her a writer. She'll be glad to see Shalimov. Wouldn't it be nice if she married him? But she's too old and she whines all the time, as if she had chronic toothache. And she's not exactly a beauty.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You always let your tongue run away with you, Sergei.

BASOV: Do I? It doesn't matter this time. We're alone. I suppose I do like to talk. (*Someone is heard to cough on the other side of the portiere.*) Who's there?

SUSLOV (*unseen*): Me.

BASOV (*going to meet him*): I was just coming over to your place.

SUSLOV (*bowing to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Come along. That's what I'm here for—to get you. Were you in town today?

BASOV: No. Why?

SUSLOV (*with a wry smile*): They say that assistant of yours won 2,000 rubles at the club last night.

BASOV: Oho!

SUSLOV: From a merchant who was soaked to the gills.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Why do you always say that?

SUSLOV: What?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You always make a point of saying the person who lost was drunk.

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*): I wasn't aware of it.

BASOV: And what if he does? It isn't as if he had said Zamyslov dosed his victim first and then took his money away from him. That, of course, would be in bad taste.

Come along, Pyotr. Varya, when Vlas comes—ah, here he is!

VLAS (*comes in carrying a worn brief-case*): Have you been missing me, my noble patron? Glad to hear it. (*To Suslov, in an exaggerated tone of warning.*) You are being searched for by a gentleman who seems to have just arrived. He goes from house to house asking in a loud voice where you live. (*Going over to his sister.*) Hullo, Varya.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Hullo.

SUSLOV: Botheration! It's probably my uncle.

BASOV: Perhaps you'd rather I didn't come then?

SUSLOV: Oh, I say! Do you think I'd enjoy being left alone with an uncle I hardly know? I haven't seen him for ten years.

BASOV (*to Vlas*): Just a minute, Vlas. (*Takes Vlas into his study.*)

SUSLOV (*lighting up*): Will you come with us, Varvara Mikhailovna?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: No, thank you. Is your uncle poor?

SUSLOV: No, he's rich. Very. Do you think it's only poor relations I dislike?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I don't know.

SUSLOV (*clearing his throat testily*): That Zamyslov is going to get Sergei into trouble one beastly day. He's a scoundrel if there ever was one, don't you think so?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*calmly*): I don't care to discuss him with you.

SUSLOV: Very well, we'll leave it at that. (*Pause.*) It seems to me that this candour of yours is ... er ... something of a pose. Watch out. It's hard to play the role of one who always says what he thinks. It takes a lot of courage, and a lot of brain. I hope you don't mind my saying so?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Not at all.

SUSLOV: Wouldn't you like to argue the point? Or perhaps in your heart of hearts you agree with me?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*very simply*): I don't know how to argue, or even to express myself properly.

SUSLOV (*glumly*): Don't be angry. I find it very hard to believe that there really are people with the courage to be themselves at all times.

SASHA (*entering*): Olga Alexeyevna said she would be over soon. Shall I put on the tea?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Do, please.

SASHA: Here comes Nikolai Petrovich. (*Goes out.*)

SUSLOV (*going to the door of the study*): Hurry up there, Sergei. I'm going.

BASOV: So am I. This very minute.

ZAMYSLOV (*entering*): Good evening, Varvara Mikhailovna. Hullo, Pyotr Ivanovich.

SUSLOV (*coughing*): Good evening. Aren't you the gay young man, just!

ZAMYSLOV: Oh, yes. Light-hearted, light-minded, light-pocketed!

SUSLOV: Quite right as to the heart and the mind, but as to the pocket—they say you stripped somebody at the club last night.

ZAMYSLOV (*mildly*): "Stripped" is said of thieves. I won some money.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: The news of you is always sensational. That, they say, is true only of exceptional people.

ZAMYSLOV: When I hear the gossip spread about me, I can't help thinking I must be exceptional. As to the money—unfortunately it was only forty-two rubles.

(*Suslov, coughing quietly, goes over to the window at left and stands looking out.*)

BASOV (*entering*): Is that all? And I was entertaining dreams of champagne! Well, have you anything to tell me? I'm in a hurry.

ZAMYSLOV: Leaving, Chief? Then I'll save my news till you come back. Nothing urgent. What a pity you weren't at the play, Varvara Mikhailovna! Yulia Filippovna's acting was marvellous! Superb!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I always enjoy seeing her.

ZAMYSLOV: Off with my head if she isn't a born actress!

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*): Too bad if you lose the wager. It would hardly be decent to go about with no head at all. Come along, Sergei. Good-bye, Varvara Mikhailovna. Good-bye. (*Bowing stiffly to Zamyslov.*)

BASOV (*glancing into his study, where Vlas is sorting papers*): So I can hope you'll have it all copied by nine o'clock in the morning, Vlas?

VLAS: You can—and may you be plagued by insomnia, my noble patron.

(*Suslov and Basov go out.*)

ZAMYSLOV: I, too, must go. Your hand, Varvara Mikhailovna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Stay and have tea with us.

ZAMYSLOV: With your permission I'll come back later. I've got to go now. (*Goes out quickly.*)

VLAS (*coming out of the study*): Is there any hope of getting tea in this house, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Ring for Sasha. (*Putting a hand on his shoulder.*) What makes you look so pale?

VLAS (*rubbing his cheek against her hand*): Tired. From ten to three I was in court, from three to seven I ran about town on various errands. Sasha! I didn't even have time for dinner.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: A clerk. Surely you could do something better than that, Vlas.

VLAS (*with mock pathos*): Oh, I know, one ought to seek the heights, and all that. But, Varya, being fond of examples, I turn to the lowly chimney-sweep—he climbs

higher than all others, but can he climb higher than his own self?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Do be serious. Why don't you want to look for some other situation—something more useful, more important?

VLAS (*in a shocked voice*): My dear girl! Here am I, a vital, albeit a humble, link in the mechanism of guarding and protecting the sacred institution of private property! And you call it useless labour! What perverted ideas you have!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You just won't be serious.

(*Sasha comes in.*)

VLAS (*to Sasha*): Take pity on me, fair lady. Bring me some tea and something to eat.

SASHA: Directly. Would you care to have a meat cake?

VLAS: A meat cake and a fish cake and anything else you can find. Only hurry up.

(*Sasha goes out. Vlas puts his arm about his sister's waist and they walk up and down.*)

VLAS: Well, how are you?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: In the dumps, Vlas. Sometimes without any particular reason I suddenly feel as if I were in prison. Everything looks strange, hostile, unwanted—by me or anybody else. Nobody is serious. Take you, for instance—you're always facetious, mocking at everybody and everything.

VLAS (*striking a pose*):

Reproach me not, beloved friend,
For my frivolity.
A weight of woe is hid behind
This seeming jollity.

Lines of my own inventing, and ever so much better than Kaleria's if you ask me. I won't read them all to you—

they're miles long. So you want me to be serious, darling? I suppose all who are one-eyed would like others to be the same.

*(Enter Sasha with the tea-things, which she deftly places about the table. The rattle of the night watchman is heard.)*

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Don't, Vlas. You oughtn't to let yourself prattle on like this.

VLAS: "Very well," said he, "and hung his head." But you're unkind, sister. All day long I'm so busy making copies of their slanderous claptrap that I have no time to talk. Naturally I want to indulge myself when evening comes.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: And I want to go away. I want to find a place where there are plain wholesome people who have a different way of talking and are doing something big and important. Do you understand what I mean?

VLAS *(thoughtfully)*: I suppose so. But you'll not go anywhere, Varya.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Perhaps I will. *(Pause. Sasha brings in the samovar.)* We're expecting Shalimov tomorrow.

VLAS *(yawning)*: I don't like what he's been writing of late. Dull, empty, lifeless stuff.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I saw him once at a party we had at school when I was a girl. I remember how firmly and resolutely he walked out on the stage; I can still see his thick unruly hair, and the look of his face, so bold and candid—the look of a person who knows what he loves and what he hates, and who is aware of his own strength. It was thrilling. I remember how he kept tossing back his hair like a dark mane, and the inspired look in his eyes. That was six or seven—no, eight years ago.

VLAS: You're as anxious to see him again as a school-

girl is to see the new teacher. Watch out, sister! Writers, they say, are great hands at seducing women!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: That's a horrid thing to say, Vlas. So commonplace.

VLAS (*simply, sincerely*): Don't be angry.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You don't understand. I look forward to his coming as to the spring. I can't go on living like this.

VLAS: I do understand. I can't either. I'm ashamed to, somehow. Ashamed and uneasy. And there doesn't seem to be anything better ahead.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: That's the whole trouble. But then why do you always—

VLAS: Make a fool of myself? I can't bear to have people see my real feelings.

(*Kaleria enters.*)

KALERIA: A glorious night! And you two sitting indoors! It smells of smoke in here.

VLAS (*shaking off his mood*): Good evening, Dreamer of Dreams.

KALERIA: The woods are rapt and still, with a gentle moon smiling down, and warm thick shadows everywhere. Night is always more lovely than day.

VLAS (*imitating her tone*): Ah, yes! As old ladies are gayer than girls, and crabs swifter than swallows.

KALERIA (*sitting down at the table*): As though you could appreciate anything! Pour me out a cup of tea, Varya. No one has been here, I suppose?

VLAS (*facetiously*): "No one" could not have been here, for "no one" does not exist.

KALERIA: Don't you ever get sick of that?

(*Vlas bows and goes into the study, where he leafs through the papers on the writing-desk. In the distance can be heard the watchman's rattle and a soft whistle.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Yulia Filippovna was here and asked for you.

KALERIA: For me? She wanted to find out about the play, I guess.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Were you in the woods?

KALERIA: Yes. I met Ryumin. He spoke to me about you.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What did he say?

KALERIA: Can't you guess?

(*Pause. Vlas sings softly through his nose.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*sighing*): I'm very sorry.

KALERIA: For him?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: He once said that falling in love with a woman was a man's tragic obligation.

KALERIA: You used to treat him differently.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Are you blaming me for that?

KALERIA: Oh, no, Varya! Not at all!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: At first I tried to cheer him up. It's true I gave him a lot of my time, but then I saw what it was leading to, and—he went away.

KALERIA: Did you have it out with him?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: No. Neither he nor I said a word.

(*Pause.*)

KALERIA: His must be a lukewarm sort of love—all expressed in pretty words, without any joy in it. A woman resents love that brings no joy. Has it ever struck you that he's hunchbacked?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*surprised*): Oh, no! Is he? Surely you're mistaken.

KALERIA: There's something mis-shapen about him—about his soul. And whenever I notice that in a person, it seems to me he is mis-shapen in body as well.

VLAS (*slapping some documents against his hand as he comes out of the study, looking very doleful*): Considering the amount of this claptrap, and basing my conclusion on said consideration, I have the honour of announcing to you, wife of my patron, that however much I so desire, I am physically unable to fulfil this unpleasant task within the time limits imposed.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'll help you later. Come and have tea.

VLAS: Sister! Dear, true sister! Kaleria Vasilyevna, take lessons in love from my sister and me while we are yet with you.

KALERIA: You, it seems, are definitely hunchbacked!

VLAS: In what respect, may I ask?

KALERIA: You have a hunchbacked soul.

VLAS: That, I hope, does not spoil my figure?

KALERIA: Rudeness is as much a deformity as a hump. Stupid people are like the lame—

VLAS (*imitating her tone*):—and the lame are like your aphorisms.

KALERIA: Vulgar people always look pock-marked to me, and they are almost always blonds.

VLAS: All brunettes get married early, and all metaphysicians are blind and deaf. What a pity they have the power of speech!

KALERIA: Very flat. I don't suppose you even know what metaphysics is.

VLAS: I do. Tobacco and metaphysics were invented for the sole purpose of giving pleasure to those who indulge. I do not smoke, and know nothing about the ill effects of tobacco, but I have tried metaphysics and know that it brings on giddiness and nausea.

KALERIA: Some people are made giddy even by the scent of flowers.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Haven't you had enough of this?

VLAS: I have. I'm going to eat—much more sensible, I find it.

KALERIA: And I'm going to play the piano—much more interesting. How stuffy it is in here, Varya!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'll open the door of the verandah. Here comes Olga.

*(Pause. Vlas has tea. Kaleria sits down at the piano. The whistle of the night watchman can be heard faintly and it is answered by an even fainter whistle. Kaleria runs her hands lightly over the keys of the middle register. Olga Alexeyevna thrusts back the portieres and rushes into the room like a great frightened bird.)*

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*snatching the shawl off her head*): Here I am! I thought I'd never get away. (*Kisses Varvara Mikhailovna.*) Good evening, Kaleria Vasilyevna. Go on playing, do. We don't have to shake hands, do we? Hullo, Vlas.

VLAS: Good evening, Olga Alexeyevna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Sit down. Shall I pour you out some tea? What kept you so long?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*nervously*): Wait a bit. It's fearfully dark out. I had the feeling that someone was hiding in the woods. The watchmen kept blowing their whistles. They make your blood run cold. What do they do it for?

VLAS: Hm, very suspicious. Maybe they're blowing them at us?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I wanted to come earlier, but Nadya was peevish—she's probably coming down with something, too. Did I tell you that Volka was laid up? Yes, he has a fever. And I had to give Sonya a bath. Misha ran off into the woods directly after dinner and just came back—torn and dirty and starved, of course. And my husband came down from town in a bad mood—

scowls and doesn't open his mouth. My head's in a perfect whirl! That new maid of mine is worse than nobody at all. She poured boiling water over the baby's bottles and they all cracked.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*smiling*): You poor dear! You must be worn out.

VLAS: Oh, Marpha! Marpha! Too many art thy cares! And so everything is either over-cared-for or under-cared-for. What wisdom lies in those words!

KALERIA: Very ugly words. "Over-cared-for"—ugh! how clumsy!

VLAS: Begging your pardon. It wasn't I who invented the language.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*slightly piqued*): I suppose you find me absurd—or tiresome. I understand. But what's to be done about it? Everyone talks about the things on his mind. Children! The very thought of them makes a bell ring inside of me. Ding, dong! Children, children! They're a great trial, Varya. If you only knew what a trial they were!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Forgive me, but I think you exaggerate.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*roused*): No, I don't. You're no judge. You've never been weighed down by that horrible sense of responsibility a mother feels. Some day my children will come and ask me what the proper way of life is, and what shall I tell them?

VLAS: Why worry in advance? Maybe they won't. Maybe they'll have their own views on the subject.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh, but you don't know! They're asking already. They're asking all the time. All sorts of impossible questions that neither you nor I nor anyone else can answer. It's a torture to be a woman.

VLAS (*softly and gravely*): A human being—that's what you want to be.

(*Goes into the study, sits down at the desk and begins to write.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Stop it, Vlas.

(*Gets up and walks slowly over to the door of the verandah.*)

KALERIA (*pensively*): The smile of the dawn put out the stars, one by one....

(*She too gets up and goes over to stand beside Varvara Mikhailovna.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh, dear! I seem to have put a damp on everybody—like the hooting of an owl in the night. Very well, I won't say another word about my troubles. Why have you gone away, Varya? Come here, or I'll think you're trying to avoid me.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*coming back quickly*): How can you say such a thing, Olga! I feel dreadfully sorry for you.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Don't. Sometimes I hate myself—and pity myself. I seem to have the disposition of an old lap-dog. They're vicious, those lap-dogs—they hate everybody and are always looking for a chance to take a nip out of somebody's calf on the sly.

KALERIA: The sun rises and the sun sets, but it's always twilight in men's souls.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: What's that?

KALERIA: Nothing in particular. I was just talking to myself.

VLAS (*sings in a nasal voice as he copies documents, putting the words to the tune of a dirge*): Family joys... family joys....

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Do stop, Vlas.

VLAS: I've stopped.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I'm the one who has spoilt his mood.

KALERIA: Some people have just come out of the woods. A pretty picture they make. Pavel Sergeyevich is waving his arms comically.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Who else is there?

KALERIA: Maria Lvovna, Yulia Filippovna, Sonya, Zimin, and Zamyslov.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*putting on her shawl*): I'm such a dowdy! That chic Yulia Filippovna is always making fun of me. I can't bear her.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Ring for Sasha, Vlas.

VLAS: Don't forget that all these little interruptions are keeping me from fulfilling my duty!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: A remarkable woman. She pays hardly any attention to her children, but they never seem to be ill.

MARIA LVOVNA (*entering from the verandah*): Your husband said you weren't feeling well. What's the matter?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm glad to see you, but I don't need your services. I'm quite all right.

(*Noise and laughter out on the verandah.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: Your face looks a little strained. (*To Olga Alexeyevna.*) You here? I haven't seen you for a long time.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: As if there were any pleasure in seeing my sour face!

MARIA LVOVNA: For all you know I may be fond of sour things. How are the children?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*entering from the verandah*): Just see all the company I've brought you! But don't get frightened—we've only come for a minute. Hullo, Olga Alexeyevna! Why don't the men come in? Pavel Sergeyevich and Zamyslov are out there, Varvara Mikhailovna. May I invite them in?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Certainly.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Come along, Kaleria Vasilyevna.

*All together*

MARIA LVOVNA (*to Vlas*): You've got thinner. Why is that?

VLAS: I don't know.

SASHA (*entering*): Shall I heat the samovar again?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Yes. And as quickly as possible.

MARIA LVOVNA (*to Vlas*): Who are you making faces at?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: He just—

VLAS: That's my profession.

MARIA LVOVNA: Always trying to be funny and never quite being it. (*To Varvara Mikhailovna.*) That Pavel Sergeyevich of yours is sure to have nervous prostration one of these days.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Why do you call him mine?

(*Enter Ryumin, followed by Yulia Filippovna and Kaleria. Vlas, frowning, goes back into the study and closes the door. Olga Alexeyevna draws Maria Lvovna aside left and whispers something to her, pointing to her chest.*)

RYUMIN: Forgive us for invading at such a late hour—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm always glad to have visitors.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: The nicest thing about living in the country is that you can dispense with ceremony. You ought to have heard them quarrelling!—him and Maria Lvovna.

RYUMIN: I can't speak calmly about things that are so important and demand being made clear—

(*Sasha brings in the samovar. Varvara Mikhailovna, who is standing at the table, quietly gives her orders as she herself arranges the tea-things. Ryumin is standing at the piano staring hard and thoughtfully at her.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: You get too excited to be convincing. (*To Varvara Mikhailovna.*) Your husband and mine are having a go at the cognac, and I suspect they're going to get good and tight. An uncle of my husband's has suddenly turned up. He sells meat or makes vegetable oil or something else in the manufacturing line. He's got a lot of curly grey hair and is always laughing and joking—quite an amusing chap. But where's my worthy knight, Nikolai Petrovich?

ZAMYSLOV (*from out on the verandah*): Here, 'neath your window, lovely Inesillia!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Come in here. What are you talking about out there?

ZAMYSLOV (*entering*): I'm corrupting youth. Sonya and Zimin have been trying to tell me that man's purpose in life is to commit himself daily to the solving of problems —social, moral, and the like. But I maintain that life is an art—the art of seeing with your own eyes, hearing with your own ears—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Twaddle!

ZAMYSLOV: I made the theory up on the spur of the moment, but accept it as my firm conviction. Life is the art of finding joy and beauty in everything, even in eating and drinking. They quarrel like savages.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Make them stop, Kaleria Vasilyevna.

ZAMYSLOV: Kaleria Vasilyevna! I know you are a lover of beauty, and yet you have no love for me. How is such an inconsistency to be explained?

KALERIA (*laughing*): You're so noisy and—and dazzling.

ZAMYSLOV: Ahem! But that's not what we were saying. We were saying that this charming young lady and I—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Enough of that! We've come—

ZAMYSLOV (*bowing to Kaleria*):—to you—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: We've come to ask—

ZAMYSLOV (*bowing even deeper*):—you—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: He won't let me ask. Let's go into that pretty little room of yours. I just adore it.

ZAMYSLOV: Do let's. At least nobody will interrupt us there.

KALERIA (*laughing*): Come along.

(*They make for the middle door.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Just wait till you see that uncle! He's too sweet for words!

ZAMYSLOV: Sweet, did you say?

(*Laughing, they disappear behind the portieres.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: She's always so cheery, and yet I know her life isn't a bed of roses. She and her husband—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*dryly*): I really don't think that's any of our business, Olga.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Why, have I said anything I oughtn't to?

RYUMIN: How many unhappy marriages there are these days!

SONYA (*putting her head in through the door*): I'm going for a walk, mummy.

MARIA LVOVNA: But you've just come from a walk.

SONYA: I know. But this house is full of women, and they're always such a bore!

MARIA LVOVNA (*banteringly*): Careful what you say, young lady! Your mother's a woman too.

SONYA (*running in*): You? Really? Since when?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: What does she mean by that?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: At least you might say how-d'ye-do.

MARIA LVOVNA: You're disgracing me, Sonya.

SONYA (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Haven't I said it? Excuse me. I'll even kiss you, and with pleasure. I'm

always kind and generous when it gives me pleasure—or doesn't cost anything.

MARIA LVOVNA: Stop your nonsense and get out of here.

SONYA: What do you think of my mother? Calling herself a woman all of a sudden! I've known her for eighteen years, but this is the first time I've ever heard that. Extraordinary!

ZIMIN (*peeping through the portieres*): Are you coming or not?

SONYA: Meet my slave.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Why don't you come in?

SONYA: He's not fit to be seen in polite society.

ZIMIN: Because she's torn the sleeve of my jacket—that's the only reason.

SONYA: The only reason! It's not enough, it seems—the lad wants more! Well, he'll get it! I'll call for you later, mummy, shall I? Now I can't wait to hear what Max has to say about undying love.

ZIMIN: You'll have a long wait!

SONYA: We'll see, youngster! Good-bye. Is the moon still up?

ZIMIN: I'm no youngster! In Sparta—I like that! Pushing a man who—

SONYA: You're not a man yet. Forward, Sparta!

(*For some time their voices and laughter are to be heard outside.*)

RYUMIN: A fine daughter you have, Maria Lvovna.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I used to be like that.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I like your relationship. Come and have tea, everybody.

MARIA LVOVNA: Yes, we're good friends—

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Friends. How is that achieved?

MARIA LVOVNA: What?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Friendship with your children.

MARIA LVOVNA: Very simply. Be honest with them—never hide the truth from them, never deceive them.

RYUMIN (*with a little laugh*): Rather a risky business, that. The truth is harsh and cold and contains the subtle poison of scepticism. A child can be ruined at the very outset by showing him the fearful face of truth.

MARIA LVOVNA: And you prefer poisoning him by degrees? To spare yourself the shock of seeing how you injure his mind?

RYUMIN (*heatedly, nervously*): But that's not what I said. It's just that I'm against all efforts—foolish, uncalled-for efforts, it seems to me—to strip life of the veils of poetry that soften its harsh and ugly lines. Life must be adorned. And we mustn't strip it of its old garments until we have new ones ready.

MARIA LVOVNA: Sorry, but I don't understand what you're talking about.

RYUMIN: About a person's right to be deceived. You're always talking about life. What is life? The word calls up before me the image of a huge, formless monster that's always demanding a sacrifice—a human sacrifice. Day after day it gobbles up human brain and brawn and swills human blood. (*Varvara Mikhailovna listens to him attentively, and gradually a look of consternation comes over her face. She makes a little movement, as if to stop him.*) Why, I don't know. I see no meaning in it, but I know that the longer a man lives, the more filth and vulgarity—crude, loathsome vulgarity—he sees, and therefore the more intense grows his longing for the Beautiful and the Pure. He is unable to overcome life's contradictions or to purge life of its filth and evil. Well, then, at least let him close his eyes to all that crushes his spirit! Let him turn his face away from whatever offends him. He wants to rest, to forget. He wants to live in peace and tranquillity. (*Catching Varvara Mikhailovna's eyes upon him, he gives a start and breaks off.*)

MARIA LVOVNA (*calmly*): Is the person you have in mind so lacking in spirit? What a pity! Is that why you think he has a right to peace and tranquillity? Not very flattering.

RYUMIN (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Excuse my . . . er . . . vehemence. I see you are displeased.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Not with your vehemence.

RYUMIN: With what?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*calmly and slowly*): I remember your saying something quite different two years ago—just as vehemently, just as convincingly.

RYUMIN (*agitatedly*): But a man changes, and so do his ideas.

MARIA LVOVNA: They dart hither and thither like a terrified mouse, those little dark thoughts of his.

RYUMIN (*still agitated*): They advance in a spiral, but they advance all the same. You seem to doubt my sincerity, Maria Lvovna.

MARIA LVOVNA: Oh, not at all. I see that you are . . . er . . . shouting sincerely, and while hysterics don't have much weight with me, I'm sure that something has given you a great fright. That's why you want to hide. And you aren't the only one. There are lots of frightened people in this world.

RYUMIN: There are, because people are coming to have a more keen and sensitive appreciation of the horrors of a life in which all things are strictly predetermined. The only chance thing is human existence, and that is without aim or meaning.

MARIA LVOVNA (*calmly*): Try to elevate the chance fact of your existence to the level of social necessity, and then life will take on meaning for you.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh dear, I simply cringe when people become harsh and accusing. It's as if it was me they were talking to, me they were accusing. There's so little kindness in the world! But it's time for me to be

going. I like to come here, Varya—I always hear something interesting, something that . . . what shall I say? . . . something that makes the finer strings vibrate. But it's late, I must be going.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Don't go yet, darling. Why do you want to, all of a sudden like this? They'll send for you if you're needed.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I suppose they will. Very well, I'll stay a little longer.

*(Goes over and sits on the sofa, tucking her feet up under her. Ryumin stands at the door of the verandah, tapping nervously on the glass with his fingers.)*

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*pensively*): How strange our lives are! We just talk and talk without doing anything. We form countless opinions that we're much too hasty in accepting and rejecting. But we have no real desires—clear, strong desires.

RYUMIN: Are you referring to me?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: To everybody. Our lives are dull, sham, ugly.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*running in followed by Kaleria*): Help me, everybody!

KALERIA: But really, this is not the time—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: She's written a new poem and promised to read it at our recital for the benefit of the Children's Home. But I want her to read it now. Do beg her to!

RYUMIN: Why not, Kaleria Vasilyevna? I'm very fond of your poetry. I find it soothing.

MARIA LVOVNA: I'd like to hear it, too. All this arguing makes us rude and rough. Read it, dear.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Something new, Kaleria?

KALERIA: Yes. Prose. Very tiresome.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Read it, that's a love! Why shouldn't you? Let's go and collect the others.

(*Goes out, drawing Kaleria with her.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: Where's Vlas Mikhailovich?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: In the study. He has a lot of work to do.

MARIA LVOVNA: I'm afraid I was a little brusque with him this evening. It's a pity to see him playing the fool all the time.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Isn't it? I wish you would be nice to him. He deserves it. Lots of people have preached to him, but no one has ever shown him any affection.

MARIA LVOVNA (*smiling*): We've all had the same experience, haven't we? That's what makes us so rude and unfeeling towards one another.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: He lived with father who was always drunk and beat him.

MARIA LVOVNA: I'll go in and speak to him.

(*Walks to the door of the study, knocks, and goes in.*)

RYUMIN (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Your friendship with Maria Lvovna seems to be growing.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Yes, I like her.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*softly*): How decided she is in her opinions! Simply downright!

RYUMIN: She has the ruthlessness of a true believer. A cold blind ruthlessness. How anyone can like that is more than I can see.

DUDAKOV (*coming in from the hall*): Good evening. Sorry if I've interrupted. So here's where you are, Olga! Coming home soon?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I can come straightaway if I'm needed. Have you been out for a walk?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What about a glass of tea, Kirill Akimovich?

DUDAKOV: No, thanks. I don't take tea so late. Pavel Sergeyevich, I'd like to speak to you. May I call tomorrow?

RYUMIN: Oh, yes.

DUDAKOV: It's about the Home for Juvenile Delinquents. They're always up to something out there, damn it all! Now it seems they beat the brats! You and I got hauled over the coals for it in yesterday's paper.

RYUMIN: The fact is, I haven't been out there lately. I have no time.

DUDAKOV: Hm . . . none of us have any time. We're always rushing from one place to another without getting anywhere. How do you account for it? As for me, I'm completely worn out. I just took a little turn in the woods to quiet my nerves. They're all on edge.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You are looking a bit drawn.

DUDAKOV: Not strange. I had another little unpleasantness today. That fool of a chief of ours complained that we weren't economical—that the patients eat too much food and we prescribe too much quinine. First of all, it's none of his blasted business. Secondly, if they'd drain the lower part of the town I wouldn't need to use any quinine at all. Does he think I eat it? I loathe quinine—and impertinence.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Is it worth letting such trifles upset you, Kirill? I should think you'd be used to them by this time.

DUDAKOV: My whole life is made up of such trifles. And what do you mean by being "used to them"? To what? To having any fool who comes along poke his nose into your business and keep you from doing what you want to do? I certainly am getting used to that! Once the chief says I must be more economical, you can be sure I will

be—even to the detriment of my work. I don't have a private practice, so I can't throw over this job.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*reproachfully*): Because you have such a large family—that's why, isn't it, Kirill? I've heard you say that before, but I hardly think this is the place to repeat it. How tactless! How unfeeling! (*She throws her shawl over her head and goes quickly towards Varvara Mikhailovna's room.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*running after her*): O'ga! What are you saying?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*almost sobbing*): Let me go! I've heard all that—

(*The two women go into Varvara Mikhailovna's room.*)

DUDAKOV: A pretty kettle of fish! I had nothing of the sort in mind. I apologize, Pavel Sergeyevich—I couldn't have foreseen such a thing. I'm . . . I'm quite upset.

(*Goes out quickly, meeting Kaleria, Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov in the doorway.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: The doctor nearly knocked us off our feet. What's wrong with him?

RYUMIN: Nerves. (*Varvara Mikhailovna comes in.*) Has Olga Alexeyevna gone home?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Yes.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: I have no confidence in that doctor. There's something unhealthy about him. He stammers and is so absent-minded—puts his tea-spoon into his spectacle-case and stirs his tea with his lancet. He could just as easily make a mistake in a prescription and give you poison.

RYUMIN: I have an idea he'll end up by putting a bullet through his head.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You say that in such an offhand way!

RYUMIN: Doctors are given to suicide.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Words touch you more than people, don't they?

RYUMIN (*starting*): Varvara Mikhailovna!

(*Kaleria sits down at the piano, Zamyslov stands beside her.*)

ZAMYSLOV: Enough light?

KALERIA: Quite.

ZAMYSLOV: Attention, everybody!

(*Maria Lvovna and Vlas come in in lively spirits.*)

VLAS: So we're to have poetry, are we?

KALERIA (*annoyed*): If you want to hear it, you'll have to stop making so much noise.

VLAS: Begone, ye wanton spirits!

MARIA LVOVNA: We won't say a word.

KALERIA: Good. This is poetry in prose. It's to be set to music.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: A recitation to music! How nice! I love anything original. I'm like a baby—get pleasure out of such things as picture postcards, automobiles—

VLAS (*imitating her*):—earthquakes, gramophones, influenza—

KALERIA (*loudly and witheringly*): May I begin? (*Everyone sits down hastily. Kaleria fingers the keys softly for a minute or two.*) It's called "Edelweiss."

The summits of the Alps are eternally wrapped in a shroud of snow and of ice, and above and about them reigns a cold silence, the silence of wisdom, breathed down from proud heights.

Boundless the heavenly wastes o'er the peaks of the mountains, and countless the stars winking sad o'er the snows.

At the foot of the mountains, on the crowded plains of earth, Life, all atremble with fear, is growing apace, while Man, weary Lord of the Plain, is bowed down by a burden of suffering.

From the caverns of earth issue laughter and groans, outcries of fury, whisp'rings of love—the grim and the many-voiced music of life. But silent are the mountain peaks, unimpassioned the stars, deaf to the moanings of men.

The summits of the Alps are eternally wrapped in a shroud of snow and of ice, and above and about them reigns a cold silence, the silence of wisdom, breathed down from proud heights.

But as if to recount, as if to confide the suff'rings of earth and the travail of men, a lone flower springs up at the foot of the peaks, in the kingdom of silence. And the name of this flower is—the edelweiss.

High in the boundless wastes of the sky sails a proud and silent sun, while at night a speechless moon shines coldly down on the earth, and the stars look down in mute trepidation.

And day in and day out cold blankets of silence descend from the heights to gently embrace the lone little flower—the edelweiss.

*(Pause. All are lost in thought. The rattle and whistle of the night watchman can be heard in the distance. Kaleria sits staring into space with wide-open eyes.)*

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*softly*): How lovely! So sad . . . so pure. . . .

ZAMYSLOV: You want to recite that in costume, in a fluffy white frock suggesting the edelweiss. Picture it? Deuced effective.

VLAS (*going over to the piano*): I like it too, really I do. (*Laughing self-consciously.*) Splendid! Marvellous! Like a drink of cold syrup on a hot day!

KALERIA: Go away!

VLAS: But I mean it. Don't be angry.

SASHA (*entering*): Mr. Shalimov has come.

(*A stir in the room. Varvara Mikhailovna goes towards the door but stops on catching sight of Shalimov. He is bald.*)

SHALIMOV: Have I the pleasure of—?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly, and after a pause*): Come in . . . do. Sergei will be here in a little while. . . .

CURTAIN

## ACT II

*A sweep of lawn in front of the Basovs' house. It is encircled by pines, firs, and birches. The verandah is hung with linen curtains. Downstage left are two pine-trees with a round table and three chairs under them. A wide bench with a back to it stands in a clump of trees downstage right. Behind the trees is a road leading into the woods. An outdoor stage with a few benches in front of it can be seen upstage right; a path connects it with the Suslovs' house. It is evening, the sun is setting. Kaleria can be heard playing the piano. Slowly and laboriously Pustobaika is arranging the benches in front of the stage. Kropilkin, a gun slung over his back, stands watching him.*

KROPILKIN: Who's taken the house over there this year?

PUSTOBAIKA (*in a surly tone*): An engineer named Suslov.

KROPILKIN: So they're new, eh?

PUSTOBAIKA: What's that?

KROPILKIN: New, I say? Not the same as lived here last year?

PUSTOBAIKA (*taking out his pipe*): The same. They're all the same.

KROPILKIN (*sighing*): Oh, I know that. All swells.

PUSTOBAIKA: All summer folk are the same. In the last five years I've seen more'n you can count. Like bubbles in a puddle on a rainy day—pop up and burst, pop up and burst.

(*Some noisy young people with guitars and mandolins and balalaikas come out from behind the house and go down the path into the woods.*)

KROPILKIN: Hear that? Music. Are they going to play-act too?

PUSTOBAIKA: Why not? They're not hungry.

KROPILKIN: I've never seen their play-acting. Must be funny. Have you seen it?

PUSTOBAIKA: I've seen everything, brother.

(*From off stage right comes the hearty laugh of Dvoyetochiye.*)

KROPILKIN: What's it like?

PUSTOBAIKA: Nothing much. They just dress themselves up and make speeches—whatever comes into their heads. Then they shout and rush about like they was doing something—like they'd gone off their chumps over something. One chap gives himself out to be honest and upright, another to be brainy, a third to be down and out. Anything you like—take your choice.

(*Someone off stage left whistles to a dog and calls*: "Here Spot, here Spot!" *Pustobaika hammers a nail into a bench with the blunt end of a hatchet.*)

KROPILKIN: Think of that now! Hm! And do they sing?

PUSTOBAIKA: Not much. Sometimes the engineer's wife has a go at it, but it's a measly little voice she's got.

KROPILKIN: Here they come.
PUSTOBAIKA: Let them.

(*Dvoyetochiye enters right, near the outdoor stage. Behind him comes Suslov.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE (*in genial tones*): Who are you to laugh at me? You're bald before you're forty, while I've got a headful of hair at sixty, even if it is grey. Guess that'll hold you! Ha, ha!

(*Pustobaika goes on fussing with the benches in a lazy, clumsy way. Kropilkin slips behind the outdoor stage.*)

SUSLOV: All the better for you. Well, go on with what you were saying.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Let's sit down. So just about this time the Germans put in an appearance. Mine is an out-of-date little factory with a lot of worthless machinery in it, while theirs is the very latest. Naturally the goods they put out were better and cheaper than mine. I could see I was going up the flue—no competing with those Germans. So I decided to sell out. (*Falls to thinking.*)

SUSLOV: Did you sell everything?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Everything but my house in town—a great big old place. And now there's nothing left for me to do but sit and count my money. Ho-hum! No fool like an old fool, as the saying goes. The bottom seemed to drop out of everything as soon as I sold out. I'm bored to death—don't know what to do with myself. These hands of mine—funny, but I never noticed them before. Now they keep dangling at the ends of my arms and getting in the way. (*Laughs. Pause. Varvara Mikhailovna comes out on the verandah and walks up and down lost in thought, her hands clasped behind her.*) Look, Basov's wife. A gem of a woman! If only I was ten years younger!

SUSLOV: But you're married, aren't you?

DVOYETOCHIYE: I was. More than once. Some of my wives died, some of them left me. And I had children—two girls. Both of them died. And a boy. He drowned. I had good luck with the women—found all my wives here in Russia. It's easy to take wives away from you Russians. You're not much as husbands. Whenever I came here on a business trip I'd look for a pretty woman with a nonentity for a husband, and—well, it never took me long to bring her round, ha, ha! (*Vlas comes out on the verandah and stands watching his sister.*) But that's all a thing of the past. Nothing and nobody left.

SUSLOV: What do you think of doing?

DVOYETOCHIYE: I don't know. Maybe you can give me some advice? I don't think much of that fish soup of yours. Nor the pork either. Who eats pork in summer?

VLAS: What's on your mind, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Oh, nothing. I'm a pathetic creature, aren't I?

VLAS (*slipping his arm round her waist*): I'd like to say something comforting, but I don't know what.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Leave me alone, dear.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Vlas is coming our way.

SUSLOV: That clown?

DVOYETOCHIYE: A lively chap, but not very ambitious.

VLAS (*coming up*): Who isn't?

DVOYETOCHIYE: A ... er ... my nephew here, ha, ha! But you don't seem to have much taste for business either.

VLAS: If I can judge on so slight an acquaintance, the word "business" means for you squeezing the juice out of your fellow-men, am I right? In that sense, alas! you are right: I have no taste for it.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Ha, ha! Don't let that trouble you. Plenty of time ahead. It's hard to be business-like when you're young—your conscience hasn't hardened yet and your head is stuffed full of pink pudding instead of brains. But as soon as you grow up you'll find it very convenient

to live on your neighbour's juices. Ha, ha! That's the quickest way to get fat.

VLAS: You seem to have had extensive experience in this line. I must take your word for it.

(*Bows and goes out.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: Ha, ha! Very pleased with himself for putting me in my place! Charming lad. Thinks himself a hero. That's all right, let him, if it amuses him. (*Drops his head and sits on in silence.*)

KALERIA (*coming out on the verandah*): Still so shocked by the change you found in him?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly*): Yes.

KALERIA: What have you to look forward to now?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*pensively*): I don't know.

(*Kaleria shrugs her shoulders and comes down off the verandah, waiks to left, disappearing behind the house.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: Hm. Well, so what's your advice, Pyotr? What am I to do?

SUSLOV: That can't be decided in a hurry. We must think it over.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Think it over? Pshaw!... What did you say?

SUSLOV: Nothing.

DVOYETOCHIYE: And you never will, I guess. Here come the writer and the lawyer. (*Shalimov and Basov emerge from the woods on the right. They nod to Suslov and Dvoyetochiye and go over to the pines on the left, where they sit down at the table. Basov has a towel round his neck.*) Out for a walk?

BASOV: We had a bathe.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Water cold?

BASOV: Not very.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Think I'll follow suit. Come along, Pyotr. Maybe I'll drown and you'll get my money sooner.

SUSLOV: I can't go yet. I want to speak to them.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Well, I'm off.

*(Gets up and goes into the woods right. Suslov watches him, then, with a little laugh, goes over to Basov.)*

BASOV: Varya, ask them to bring us a bottle of beer—or rather, three. Well, how do you find your uncle?

*(Varvara Mikhailovna goes inside.)*

SUSLOV: A bit stuffy.

BASOV: Old men aren't very amusing.

SUSLOV: He's angling for an invitation to live with me.

BASOV: That so? And how do you feel about it?

SUSLOV: I can't say exactly. I suppose he'll have his way.

*(Sasha brings in the beer.)*

BASOV: What are you so silent about, Yakov?

SHALIMOV: I'm a little out of sorts. What did you say was the name of that belligerent lady?

BASOV: Maria Lvovna. You ought to have heard the battle we had at dinner today, Pyotr!

SUSLOV: Maria Lvovna again?

SHALIMOV: She's a ferocious fighter, I will say that for her.

*(Varvara Mikhailovna comes out on the verandah again.)*

SUSLOV: She's not the woman for me.

SHALIMOV: I'm very mild by nature, but I confess I could hardly keep myself from being insulting.

BASOV (*laughing*): Which was more than she could.

SHALIMOV (*to Suslov*): Put yourself in my place: here am I, a writer, a man who goes through all sorts of emotional experiences, and who, in the end, gets worn out by them. I come here to have a rest, to live in complete relaxation and collect my thoughts, and all of a sudden a lady swoops down on me and begins searching my soul: What do you believe in? What do you live for? Why don't you write about this? Why do you write about that? Your ideas on this are hazy, on that are wrong, on the other are ugly. Good God! Do your own writing, madam, if you know so well how to make everything clear and right and beautiful! Write the finest book that ever was written, but for God's sake leave me in peace!

BASOV: A writer's fate! When people travel down the Volga, they make a point of eating sturgeon, and when they meet a writer, they show off their brains. Grin and bear it, old man.

SHALIMOV: She shows neither brains nor tact. Does she often come to your house?

BASOV: No. That is, pretty often. I don't encourage it. She's too opinionated for me. And too straight-laced. It's my wife that makes friends with her. She has a bad influence over my wife. (*Glances up on the verandah and sees Varvara Mikhailovna.*) Oh, you here, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: As you see.

(*Zamyslov and Yulia Filippovna come quickly down the path from Suslov's house. They are laughing. Shalimov notices Basov's discomfiture and laughs to himself.*)

ZAMYSLOV: Varvara Mikhailovna! We're getting up a picnic! We're going in boats!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Hullo, darling!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Come inside.

(*They go in. Suslov gets up and follows them slowly.*)

ZAMYSLOV: Is Kaleria Vasilyevna at home?

SHALIMOV (*laughing*): You're a bit afraid of your wife, aren't you, Sergei?

BASOV (*sighing*): Nonsense. She's an awfully good sort.

SHALIMOV (*with a little laugh*): Why do you say that so ruefully?

BASOV (*under his breath, with a nod in the direction of Suslov*): He's jealous. Of my assistant. His wife—have you noticed her?—she is quite a beauty.

(*Sonya and Zimin pass in the background.*)

SHALIMOV: Really? I must be more observant. Although, to tell you the truth, that Maria Lvovna has put a damp on my desire to meet women.

BASOV: Oh, but she's different: She's—but you'll see. (*Pause.*) You haven't come out with anything new in a long time, Yakov. Writing something big?

SHALIMOV (*grumpily*): If you must know, I'm not writing at all. Who can write in times like these? There's no making head or tail of what's going on. People are all so hazy and mixed up—you can't put your finger on them.

BASOV: Write just that—that you can't make head or tail of it all. Sincerity is the main thing in a writer.

SHALIMOV: Thanks. Sincerity, indeed. It's not a matter of sincerity. If I were really sincere, there would be just one thing for me to do: drop everything and sow cabbages, like the venerable Diocletian. (*From behind the house comes the doleful chant of some beggars*: "A crust, good people, in the name of Christ and in memory of the dear departed; in the name of Christ and in memory of the dear departed." *Pustobaika comes on and chases them away.*) But one must eat, and so one must write. For whom? I don't know. A writer ought to see his reader very clearly in his mind's eye. Who is he? What is he like? Five years ago I was sure I knew who

he was and what he wanted of me But all of a sudden I lost sight of him. That's it—lost sight of him. Are you aware of the drama in those words? They say a new sort of reader has been born. Perhaps, but I don't know him. Who is he?

BASOV: I don't quite follow you. What do you mean—lost sight of your reader? What about me? And all the intellectuals in the country? We're your readers, aren't we? How can you lose sight of us?

SHALIMOV (*reflectively*): Oh, yes—the intellectuals. I'm not speaking of them. I'm speaking of that other—that new type of reader.

BASOV (*shaking his head*): I don't understand.

SHALIMOV: Neither do I, but I have a feeling. Whenever I walk down the street I see people of a new type. There's something special in their faces—and in their eyes. I look at them and think to myself: they won't read me, they're not interested in what I have to say. This winter I read my work at some sort of a gathering. I saw them there, too. They kept looking at me—looking at me with all their eyes—attentively, searchingly, but I could see they weren't my sort. They don't like me They have about as much need of me as of Latin. They find me outworn—and my ideas too. Who could they be? Who do they like? What is it they want?

BASOV: Hm, very curious. But isn't it just nerves with you? After you've been here awhile and had a good rest, you'll calm down and find your reader. The important thing is to take things calmly. That's how I see it. Let's go inside. But there's one thing I'd like to ask of you, Yakov: show off a bit ... er ... act the peacock, so to speak.

SHALIMOV (*taken aback*): What do you mean, act the peacock?

BASOV (*mysteriously*): ... er ... spread your tail and show off your feathers. For Varya's sake—my wife. Catch

her eye . . . make her sit up and take notice. That's a good friend.

SHALIMOV (*after a pause*): In other words, I'm to act as a lightning rod, is that it? Funny fellow you are. Very well, if that's what you want.

BASOV: Oh, don't go thinking things. She's a good wife and all that, but she seems to be brooding over something. Everybody's brooding these days. Moods are the vogue—serious talks on strange themes, etcetera. In a word, something's wrong somewhere. By the way, are you married? That is, I heard you had left your wife.

SHALIMOV: I married again, and left again. It's hard to find a woman who is a good companion.

BASOV: Oh yes, that's true enough. Very true indeed.

(*They go into the house. The Woman in Yellow and the Young Man in a Checked Suit come out of the woods.*)

WOMAN: What? Nobody here yet? And we were told to come at six. How do you like that?

YOUNG MAN: To be frank with you, I'm used to being the leading man—

WOMAN: Simply the limit! But I expected as much.

YOUNG MAN:—the leading man, and he gives me a comedy part. I consider that an affront.

WOMAN: They keep all the best ones for themselves.

(*They go off into the woods right. From the opposite side come Sonya and Zimin. In the back, Suslov is seen returning slowly to his own house.*)

ZIMIN (*under his breath*): I won't come in, Sonya. And so it's settled: tomorrow I'm leaving.

SONYA (*in the same tone*): Settled. But do be careful, Max, I beg you to.

ZIMIN (*taking her hand*): And you too.

SONYA: Good-bye. I suppose it'll be three weeks before we see each other again, won't it?

ZIMIN: Yes, darling. Good-bye. When I'm gone, don't— *(Breaks off, embarrassed.)*

SONYA: Don't what?

ZIMIN: Oh, nothing. Foolishness. Good-bye, Sonya.

SONYA (*holding on to his hand*): No, finish what you began to say. When you're gone, don't what?

ZIMIN (*softly, dropping his head*): Don't marry somebody else.

SONYA: How dare you say such a thing, Max! Or think such a thing! It's stupid, and . . . horrid! Can't you see it?

ZIMIN: Yes, but . . . well, don't be angry. Forgive me. Such thoughts pop into your head without being invited. They say a person can't control his feelings.

SONYA (*vehemently*): That's not true! It's not, and you ought to know it. People say such things just to excuse their weakness of character, but I don't believe them. Remember, Max: I don't believe them. Now run along.

ZIMIN (*squeezing her hand*): I'm glad, and I will remember, Sonya—I will. Good-bye, sweetheart.

*(He goes quickly behind the house. Sonya watches him, then climbs the verandah slowly and goes inside. Dudakov, Vlas and Maria Lvovna come out of the woods right; just behind them comes Dvoyetochiye. Maria Lvovna sits down on the bench, Dvoyetochiye sits beside her and yawns.)*

DUDAKOV: How can people take things so easy when life's so hard?

VLAS: Can't say, doctor. To continue: my father was a cook, and a person with a vivid imagination. He loved me cruelly and dragged me with him wherever he went, like his pipe. Several times I escaped and ran back to my mother, but each time he turned up at the laundry,

knocked down anyone who got in his way, and took me in tow again. Once when he was working for the bishop he got the fatal idea of giving me an education. That's how I found myself in a seminary, but a few months later he went to work for an engineer, and I was sent to a technical school. In a year's time I was studying in an agricultural college because father went to work for the Chairman of the Rural Land Administration. An art school and a commercial college are among the other educational institutions that had the honour of finding me within their walls. In a word, by the time I was seventeen I had developed such an aversion to study that I couldn't make myself learn anything, not even to smoke or play cards.... Why are you looking at me like that, Maria Lvovna?

MARIA LVOVNA (*pensively*): A very depressing story.

VLAS: Depressing? But it's all a thing of the past.

WOMAN WITH A TIED-UP FACE: Has anyone seen our Zhenya? Has he come this way? A little boy in a straw hat. Fair-haired—

MARIA LVOVNA: We haven't seen him.

WOMAN: The little scamp! He's the Rozovs' boy. Are you sure you haven't seen him—a lively little fellow with—

VLAS: Quite sure, nanny.

(*The woman goes out mumbling.*)

DVOYETOCHIE: Do you know, Vlas, I rather ... er....

VLAS: What?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Like you.

VLAS: Not really!

DVOYETOCHIYE: Yes, really!

VLAS: That does you credit.

(*Dvoyetochiye laughs.*)

DUDAKOV: You're going to have a hard time, Vlas.

VLAS: When?

DUDAKOV: Always.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Of course he is, because he's straight, and people will amuse themselves by trying to put crooks in him.

VLAS: That remains to be seen. But let's go in and have tea, shall we? It must be ready by this time.

DUDAKOV: An excellent idea.

DVOYETOCHIYE: I wouldn't mind, but—the hostess?

VLAS: The hostess will be glad to have you. Come along.

(*Vlas runs into the house, the others following him leisurely.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: A fine chap.

MARIA LVOVNA: Yes, but he's never himself.

DVOYETOCHIYE: That's all right. That'll pass. He's honest to the very core. Most people wear their honesty on the outside, like a necktie, and they go about shouting: "I'm honest, I'm honest, I'm honest!" But when a girl keeps saying over and over: "I'm still a maid, I'm still a maid," you can be sure she's been plucked. Ha, ha! Begging your pardon, Maria Lvovna.

MARIA LVOVNA (*smiling*): What's to be expected of the likes of you?

(*They go up on the verandah and into the house. Suslov meets them as he comes out.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: Where are you going, Pyotr?

SUSLOV: Oh, I just came out for a smoke.

(*He saunters off in the direction of his own house. The Woman with a Tied-up Face comes running up the path in his direction. The Man in a Top Hat comes out of the woods, stops, shrugs his shoulders.*)

WOMAN: I'm looking for a little boy. You haven't seen him, have you? Zhenya's his name. In a jacket.

SUSLOV (*under his breath*): No, I haven't. Go away.

(*The Woman runs off.*)

MAN IN A TOP HAT (*bowing graciously*): I beg your pardon, sir, but is it me you're looking for?

SUSLOV (*in surprise*): I'm not looking for anybody. That woman was looking for a child.

MAN IN A TOP HAT: I was invited, you see, to come and play the leading part in a play—

SUSLOV (*walking away*): That doesn't concern me.

MAN IN A TOP HAT (*offended*): But who *does* it concern? Where's the stage manager? For two hours I've been wandering about waiting. (*Noticing that Suslov has gone.*) Walked off, the boor!

(*Goes over to the summer stage and disappears behind it. Olga Alexeyevna comes down the path from the Suslovs.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Good evening, Pyotr Ivanovich.

SUSLOV: Good evening. Very warm, I find it.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Do you? I don't.

SUSLOV (*lighting up*): Suffocating. A pack of lunatics seem to have been set loose on the premises. They go about looking for little boys and stage managers.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I know. You must have had a hard day. Your hands are shaking.

SUSLOV (*walking back with her to the Basovs' house*): That's because I drank too much and slept too little last night.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: What makes you drink?

SUSLOV: A man's got to get some joy out of life.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Have you seen my husband?

SUSLOV: He's having tea at the Basovs'.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*coming out on the verandah*): Coming in, Olga?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I was just taking a little walk.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Why did you leave us, Pyotr Ivanovich?

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*): I wanted to get down to earth. I'm sick of listening to the highfalutin speeches of Maria Lvovna and that man of letters.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Are you? I don't mind listening.

SUSLOV (*with a shrug of his shoulders*): Very glad. Good-bye for the present. (*Goes off to his house.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*under her breath*): What do you suppose makes him like that?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I don't know and don't care. Shall we go inside?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: No, let's sit here awhile. They can get on without you.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Very nicely. You're upset about something again, aren't you?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: How can I help being, Varya? He didn't stay home five minutes after coming down from town this evening. How would *you* like it?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: He's here.

(*They walk slowly over to a clump of firs.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*irritably*): He avoids me and the children. Oh, I know he works hard and needs a rest, but so do I. If you ever knew how tired I am! I can't work properly—I do everything wrong, and that upsets me more than ever. He ought to realize I've sacrificed my youth and my strength for him.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*gently*): Poor Olga! You love to complain, don't you?

(*A murmur of voices raised in argument comes from the house. The sound increases.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I don't know, perhaps I do. I want to tell him that I think I ought to go away—take the children and go away.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Quite right. A brief separation would do both of you good. I'll lend you the money.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I owe you so much as it is!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Oh, it's nothing. Don't let it trouble you. Let's sit down.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I hate myself for not being able to get on without you. Hate myself! Do you think it's easy for me to accept your money—your husband's money? A person loses all his self-respect when he finds he can't live independently—always has to be helped and supported. Sometimes I even hate you for it—for being so tranquil; inwardly disapproving, but never coming out with it, never really living and feeling.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: But, darling, I don't know how to do anything but keep quiet. I won't allow myself to complain.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: In the bottom of their hearts those who give must despise those who take. I wish I were the one who did the giving.

(*Ryumin walks briskly up to the house.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: So that you could despise those who took?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Yes. I don't like people. I don't like Maria Lvovna. Why is she always criticizing others? And I don't like Ryumin. He spends all his time philosophizing and hasn't the courage to do anything at all. And I don't like your husband. He's soft as dough, and he's afraid of you. Do you approve of that? And your brother. He's in love with that woman preacher, that termagant of a Maria Lvovna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*surprised and reproachful*): Olga! What are you saying? That really isn't nice.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Maybe it isn't, but it's the truth. And that conceited Kaleria. She keeps raving on about beauty, but what she really wants is a husband.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*coldly and severely*): You oughtn't to let such feelings run away with you, Olga. They'll lead you into a bog.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*softly, but vengefully*): I don't care. I don't care where they lead me so long as it's out of this insufferable boredom! I want to get a taste of life! I have as much right as anybody else. I'm not so stupid as not to see what's going on. I can see that you, too—oh, I understand. Yours is an easy life. Your husband is rich—he's none too scrupulous in business matters. Everybody says that about him, and you ought to know it. And you, too—you've done something so as not to have children—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*gets up slowly and stands looking at Olga Alexeyevna in astonishment*): What are you implying?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*uneasily*): Nothing. I just meant to say that . . . my husband says lots of women don't want to have children.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I don't know what you mean, but you seem to be accusing me of something loathsome, I don't want to know what it is.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Don't speak like that, Varya; don't look at me like that. After all, it's the truth. They do say nasty things about your husband.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*shudders and speaks pensively*): You and I have been like sisters, Olga. If I didn't know how unhappy you were, if I didn't remember that once you and I dreamed of quite a different way of life. . . .

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*sincerely*): Forgive me. Please forgive me. I'm hateful.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Our lives were to be full and beautiful. And together we wept over our lost dreams.

You've hurt me, Olga. Was that what you wanted to do? Hurt me awfully.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Don't say that, Varya!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm going away. (*Olga Alexeyevna gets up.*) No, don't come with me. I don't want you to.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: For good, Varya? For good?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Stay here. I can't understand why you said such things.

(*Dvoyetochiye runs down the steps of the verandah and takes Varvara Mikhailovna's arm.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE (*laughing*): I've run away, young lady! That handsome philosopher of yours, Mr. Ryumin, has got me in a dither. I don't know all the learned words, and so I can't answer back. He drowned me in the flood of his eloquence like a cockroach in treacle. And so I took to my heels. To hell with him! I much prefer talking to you. This old codger's quite gone on you, my dear. But why that abstracted look? (*Catches sight of Olga Alexeyevna and gives a dissatisfied grunt.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*meekly*): Shall I go away, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*firmly*): Yes. (*Olga Alexeyevna goes off quickly. Varvara Mikhailovna watches her go, then turns to Dvoyetochiye.*) What were you saying? Forgive me, I—

DVOYETOCHIYE (*amiably*): You feel like a fish out of water here, don't you? This is no place for you, my dear. (*Laughs.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*with a withering look*): Who has given you a right to use that tone with me, Semyon Semyonovich?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Now, now, none of that! It's my age and my experience that's given me the right.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I beg your pardon, but it

seems to me they don't give anyone the right to intrude in—

DVOYETOCHIYE (*good-naturedly*): I'm not really intruding. It's just that I can see you're not their sort, and I'm not their sort either, and I had a longing to speak to you. But I guess I made a blunder, in which case I beg your pardon.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*laughing*): And I beg yours. I was rather rude, I'm afraid, but I'm not used to being spoken to like that.

DVOYETOCHIYE: I can see you're not used to it. How are you to get used to it in a place like this? Let's go for a walk, shall we? Do an old man the favour.

(*Semyonov rides swiftly up on a cycle and nearly falls at Dvoyetochiye's feet.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE (*startled*): Where are you going, young man? What's this?

SEMYONOV (*breathing hard*): I beg your pardon. Is everything over?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Is what over? Are you mad?

SEMYONOV: Such a pity! A tyre blew. I had two rehearsals today.

DVOYETOCHIYE: What do I care?

SEMYONOV: Why, aren't you taking part? I beg your pardon. I thought you were in a wig and make-up.

DVOYETOCHIYE (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): What's he talking about?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Have you come for the rehearsal?

SEMYONOV: Yes, and on the way—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: It hasn't begun yet.

SEMYONOV (*joyfully*): Oh, thank you. I was so put out! I'm always very punctual.

DVOYETOCHIYE: What were you put out about?

SEMYONOV (*graciously*): That is, I would have been put out if I had been late. I beg your pardon. (*Goes to the summer stage, bowing.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: Queer sort of insect. Nearly ran us down—how do you like that! Let's get away from here, Varvara Mikhailovna, before some other conundrum bumps into us.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*disconcerted*): Very well. I'll get a scarf. Just a minute.

(*Goes into the house. Semyonov comes up to Dvoyetochiye.*)

SEMYONOV: Some others are riding up—two girls and a cadet.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Think of that, now! Very glad to hear it.

SEMYONOV: They'll be here in a minute. That cadet—do you know who he is? He's the brother of the girl who shot herself.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Think of that now!

SEMYONOV: Very sensational, wasn't it? A kid like that to go and shoot herself!

DVOYETOCHIYE: Very sensational indeed.

SEMYONOV: I really did think you were in make-up. All that hair. And your face, too.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Thanks. Very flattering.

SEMYONOV: Oh, I didn't mean to be flattering, really I didn't!

DVOYETOCHIYE: I'm sure you didn't. Only I don't see where the flattery comes in.

SEMYONOV: You don't? Why, a person's always better-looking when he's made up. You don't happen to be the settings artist, do you?

(*Suslov comes out of the woods. In the background can be seen the Woman in Yellow and the Young Man in a Checked Suit.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: No, I happen to be the uncle of that gentleman.

WOMAN IN YELLOW: Mr. Sazanov!

SEMYONOV: It's me she's calling. Strange: I've got a very ordinary name, but nobody ever remembers it. Good-bye.

(*Goes towards the woman, bowing quickly.*)

SUSLOV (*coming up*): Have you seen my wife? (*Dvoyetochiye shakes his head and gives a sigh of relief.*) The actors seem to be collecting.

DVOYETOCHIYE: That young bur fastened himself on me. Called me a settings artist or something of the sort, the bandy-legged amoeba! There they are, quarrelling again!

(*Out of the house come Kaleria, Shalimov, Ryumin, and Varvara Mikhailovna. Dvoyetochiye goes over to them and listens attentively. Suslov sits down on a bench and watches them with a sullen look on his face.*)

SHALIMOV (*exhausted*): I'd like to flee to the North Pole to escape her hot temper.

RYUMIN: What gets me is that she's so despotic! It's criminal to be so intolerant. Why do people like her assume that everybody ought to think as they do?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*giving all of them a searching look*): Prove to them that there is something greater and more beautiful than the things they believe in.

KALERIA: What do you see great or beautiful in dreams of full bellies for all?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*moved*): I don't know. But I don't find anything more appealing. (*Shalimov is interested.*) I can't express myself, but I feel in my heart that we ought to instill in people a sense of their human worth—in all people, without exception. Then we would

stop insulting each other. We don't respect one another's feelings, and that's so hurtful, so regrettable.

KALERIA: But good God! It isn't Maria Lvovna who is to teach us that!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Why are you all so dead set against her?

RYUMIN: It's her own fault. She gets on people's nerves. Whenever someone tries to explain the meaning of life to me I feel as if I were caught in a vice and being squeezed out of shape.

KALERIA: It's impossible to live with such people!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: And is it possible to live with people who do nothing but complain, Kaleria? Let's be honest: is it possible to live with people who do nothing but talk about themselves and fill the air with their complaints and yet do nothing to improve life? What do we do, you and I?

RYUMIN: And she? Maria Lvovna? All she does is stir up bad feelings.

KALERIA: And dig up old mottoes that are better forgotten. The living cannot be guided by dead precepts.

*(The amateur players gather about the summer stage. Pustobaika is up on the stage arranging chairs.)*

DVOYETOCHIYE: Don't take it so to heart, Varvara Mikhailovna. Let's drop the subject and go for a walk. You promised to.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Yes, and I will. It's so awful not to be able to put one's thoughts and feelings into words! I'm a sort of intellectual mute.

SHALIMOV: But you're not, Varvara Mikhailovna. May I join you?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: If you wish.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Let's go to the summer-house down by the river. What are you so wrought up about, my dear?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I feel that there's been some sad misunderstanding—

*(They go off into the woods. Suslov watches them go, then gives a little laugh.)*

RYUMIN (*watching them*): She certainly has perked up since that Shalimov arrived. The way she talks! And what is he, after all? She can't help seeing that he's written himself out. When he expresses his opinions so confidently he's just lying to himself and deceiving others.

KALERIA: She knows this. I saw her crying like a disappointed child after she had talked with him last night. Before he came she was sure he was strong and brave, and she expected him to bring novelty and interest into her barren life.

*(Zamyslov and Yulia Filippovna come out from behind the house. He whispers something that makes her laugh. Suslov sees them.)*

RYUMIN: Let's go in. Perhaps you'll play something for us? I'm in the mood for music.

KALERIA: Just as you like. Yes, it's very sad when everything about you is so—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Look! The players have come! The rehearsal was called for six, and now it's—?

ZAMYSLOV: Half past seven. You used to be the only one who came late. Now everybody does. That's your influence.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Are you being impudent?

ZAMYSLOV: I'm being flattering. But I've got to run in and see the chief a moment. Will you excuse me?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Don't be long!

*(Zamyslov goes into the house. Yulia Filippovna hums to herself as she strolls over to the clump of trees. She catches sight of her husband.)*

SUSLOV: Where have you been?
YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Down there. And out there.

*(The Woman in Yellow, the Young Man, Semyonov, the cadet and the two girls are standing near the stage. Pustobaika is putting a table in place with a great deal of noise. Laughter, exclamations of:* "Listen, everybody!" "Where's the regisseur?" "Mr. Stepanov!" "He's here somewhere, I saw him." "We'll miss the train back to town!" "I beg your pardon, but my name's not Stepanov. It's Semyonov.")

SUSLOV: With him all the time? With that . . . that. . . . And so openly. Think what you're doing, Yulia! Everybody's laughing at me.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: They are? How horrid.

SUSLOV: We've got to have it out, you and I. I can't allow you to—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: I certainly don't want to be the wife of a man everybody laughs at.

SUSLOV: Be careful, Yulia! I'm capable of—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:—being a boor. I know that.

SUSLOV: How dare you say such a thing, you slut!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*calmly, and in lowered tones*): We'll finish this little scene at home. People are coming. Go away. If you could see your face!

*(Gives a little shudder of disgust. Suslov takes a step towards her, then backs away quickly and hurries off down the path into the woods, muttering through his teeth as he goes.)*

SUSLOV: Some day I'll shoot you!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*calling after him*): Why not today?

(*Singing.*) "The weary day draws to a close..." (*Her voice quivers.*) "...recedes in crimson waves...."

(*She stares into space with wide-open eyes for a moment, then slowly drops her head. Maria Lvovna comes out of the house in a state of excitement. Behind her come Dudakov and Basov with fishing-rods in their hands.*)

BASOV (*untangling his line*): You want to be gentler, Maria Lvovna. More amiable. We're all human beings like yourself. Damn it all! Who could have got this in such a tangle?

MARIA LVOVNA: But you don't understand!

DUDAKOV: Can't you see he's tired?

BASOV: You aren't right. According to you, once a man's a writer, he ought to be one of the minor deities. Not every writer has such aspirations.

MARIA LVOVNA: We've got to demand more and more of life and people.

BASOV: I understand that. But within the limits of the possible. Everything develops gradually. Evolution! That's a thing we must never forget.

MARIA LVOVNA: I don't ask for the impossible. But we live in a country where the only person who can voice the truth, the only one who can judge impartially of the vices and virtues of our people and carry on a struggle to improve their condition, is the writer. He alone can do this, and this alone is what he ought to do.

BASOV: True enough, but—

MARIA LVOVNA (*coming down the steps*): I can't see that your friend is doing this. What are his aims? What are his ideals? What does he hate? What does he love? What does he call right and wrong? Is he friend or foe? I don't know.

(*Goes off quickly, disappearing behind the house.*)

Basov (*still untangling his line*): I respect you for your . . . er . . . ebullition, Maria Lvovna, but—gone? Why in the world do you suppose she gets all that steam up? Every schoolboy knows that a writer's supposed to be honest and . . . well . . . work for the good of the people and all that; and a soldier's supposed to be brave; and a lawyer's supposed to be clever. But this incorrigible woman insists on hammering you over the head with her platitudes. Well, Doc, let's go and see how the perch are biting. Who the hell could have got my line in such a state?

Dudakov: Hm. She says a lot of things that set you to thinking. But then she has an easy life. She has her own practice and doesn't need many patients.

Basov: That Yakov's a rascal. Did you see how adroitly he slipped out of the corner she pushed him into? (*Laughs.*) He talks very prettily when he's in good form. Yes, he talks prettily, but after the death of his first wife, with whom, by the way, he only lived six months before he threw her over—

Dudakov: One doesn't say that in polite society. One says that he and his wife parted.

Basov: Let's say they parted. But now that she's dead he's put in a claim to her little estate. Not bad, eh?

Dudakov: Tck, tck, tck! Very bad indeed. Going a little too far, I should say.

Basov: He doesn't seem to think so. Well, let's go down to the river.

Dudakov: Know what I've been thinking?

Basov: No. What?

Dudakov (*slowly and thoughtfully*): Aren't you surprised—that is, don't you find it strange that we haven't come to hate each other?

Basov (*stopping*): Wha-at? Are you joking?

Dudakov: Not at all. After all, we're a worthless lot, don't you think so?

BASOV (*walking up and down*): No, I don't. I take a healthy view of life. I'm a normal person on the whole, if you don't mind my saying so.

DUDAKOV: Don't try to laugh it off.

BASOV: Me? Listen, Doc, I'm afraid you're a little ... ahem! In a word, you're in need of your own professional services. Are you sure you won't push me into the river when we get there?

DUDAKOV (*gravely, with a shrug of his shoulders*): Why should I?

BASOV (*walking away*): How do I know? You're in a very odd mood.

DUDAKOV (*glumly*): It's hard to talk seriously with you.

BASOV: Don't try. Your idea of serious talk is a very queer one. Let's avoid it.

(*Basov and Dudakov go out. Sonya and Vlas come in right. Zamyslov comes out of the house and runs over to the stage, where he is greeted noisily. The players crowd round him as he tries to explain something to them.*)

SONYA: I don't believe you're really a poet.

VLAS: Too bad. I've written some very good things, as, for instance:

Cognac and caviar, alas!
Are dainties of the upper class.
And so poor Vlas must let them pass—
Cognac and caviar. Alas!

SONYA (*laughing*): Why do you waste your time on such nonsense? Why don't you take yourself more seriously?

VLAS (*softly and mysteriously*): Ah, my dear Sonya, I've tried that, too. I even have poetry to prove it. (*Sings through his nose*):

Too great to stoop to little things,
Too little to attempt the great—

SONYA (*earnestly*): What makes you like that? You don't want to be ridiculous, I'm sure. What *do* you want?

VLAS (*brightly*): To be happy!

SONYA: And what are you doing about it?

VLAS (*crumpling*): Nothing. Not the least little thing.

MARIA LVOVNA (*from the woods*): Sonya!

SONYA: Here I am! What is it?

MARIA LVOVNA: Some friends have come to see you.

SONYA: I'll be along! (*Maria Lvovna appears on the path leading out of the woods*): Here, take over this clown. He talks nothing but nonsense and needs a good spanking for it. (*Runs off.*)

VLAS (*meekly*): Well, begin. Your daughter spanked me all the way from the station, but I'm still alive.

MARIA LVOVNA (*gently*): Don't talk like that. You only lower yourself in your own and everyone else's estimation. You oughtn't to.

VLAS (*avoiding her eyes*): You say I oughtn't to, but everybody's so damned serious. Why don't they ever laugh? (*Suddenly speaking simply, sincerely, vehemently.*) I'm fed up with it all, Maria Lvovna. I have no love or respect for any of these people. They're as small and insignificant as mosquitoes. I can't talk seriously to them. They make me want to assume a pose, and do it more openly than they do. My head is stuffed full of all sorts of trash. I want to shout and brawl and complain. Damn it all, I'll start drinking soon if something doesn't happen! I can't help doing as they do when I'm with them, and that's why I've become such a monstrosity. I'm poisoned by their vulgarity. There they are—hear them? They're coming this way. Sometimes I can't bear the sight of them. Come away. I want terribly to talk to you.

MARIA LVOVNA (*taking his arm*): If you only knew how glad I am to see you like this!

VLAS: Sometimes it is all I can do to keep myself from insulting them to their faces.

(*They go into the woods. Shalimov, Yulia Filippovna and Varvara Mikhailovna come on right.*)

SHALIMOV: Serious talk again? Spare me! I've had all the philosophy I can stand. Let me vegetate awhile, at least until my nerves are in order. All I want is to take walks and flirt with the ladies.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Doesn't flirting with the ladies upset your nerves? Very strange. Why don't you flirt with me?

SHALIMOV: I shall be only too glad to take advantage of your gracious consent.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: I haven't given my consent. I've only asked you a question.

SHALIMOV: Allow me to accept the question as a sort of consent.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Enough of this. Answer my question, and answer it truly.

SHALIMOV: I admit the possibility of being friends with a woman, but not for long. Nature will have her way.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: In other words, you consider friendship as merely a preface to love?

SHALIMOV: I take love very seriously. When I love a woman, I wish to elevate her, to shower upon her the flowering of my thoughts and feelings.

ZAMYSLOV (*from the stage*): Yulia Filippovna! Come here!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Coming! Good-bye for the present, Monsieur horticulturist! See that your orchids are put in order! (*Goes over to the stage.*)

SHALIMOV: Oh, that I shall, and as soon as possible! What a gay and attractive little piece she is! Why that strange look, Varvara Mikhailovna?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: That moustache suits you perfectly.

SHALIMOV (*smiling*): Does it? Thank you. You seem to be shocked by my tone. You're very strict. But you'll admit it would be difficult to adopt any other tone with her.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm afraid nothing will shock me any more.

SHALIMOV: I see. You didn't expect to find me like this, did you? But one can't go around shouting out his ideas like that hysterical Ryumin. Oh, I beg your pardon—it seems he's your friend.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*shaking her head*): I have no friends.

SHALIMOV: I set too high a value on my inner world to expose it to the first person who comes along. The followers of Pythagoras revealed their secrets only to the chosen.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: And now your moustache seems superfluous.

SHALIMOV: Drat this moustache! You know the saying: When among wolves, howl like a wolf. A very wise saying, especially for one who has drunk the cup of loneliness to the dregs. You, it seems, have not yet had your fill, and so it is hard for you to understand one who—but I'm afraid I'm keeping you.

(*Bows and goes over to the benches where a few onlookers are watching Zamyslov who, with a book in his hand, is stealing silently across the stage, showing Semyonov how a certain scene should be acted. Basov comes towards the house with his fishing-rod.*)

Basov: Varya! What fishing! Even the doctor, bungler that he is, got a bite straight off! How is this for a perch, eh? The uncle caught three. (*Glances about.*) Listen, as I was coming up the path I saw Vlas down on his knees to Maria Lvovna! Near the summer-house. Think of that! Kissing her hand! You'll have to speak to him, dear. After all, he's scarcely more than a boy. She's old enough to be his mother.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*softly*): Sergei, promise not to mention this—not to a soul! You don't understand. You see it in the wrong way. I'm afraid you'll tell everybody and that will be dreadful.

Basov: What are you so upset about? If I'm not to mention it, I won't, that's all. But isn't it ridiculous? That Maria Lvovna—

Varvara Mikhailovna: Promise me on your word of honour to forget all about it. Promise!

Basov: I promise. To hell with them. But explain it if you can.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I can't. But I know it isn't what you think it is. It's not a flirtation.

Basov: Humph! Not a flirtation? Tck, tck! Then what is it, Varya? Very well, I'll not say a word, have no fear. I'm off to catch more perch—I hear nothing, see nothing, know nothing. Oh, yes, by the way—Yakov turns out to be rather a beast.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*alarmed*): Why, what's happened, Sergei? Something new?

Basov: You're terribly nervous, Varya. This is quite a different story.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*softly, recoiling*): I don't want to hear it. Really I don't, Sergei.

Basov (*quickly, in surprise*): But it's nothing in particular, you silly puss! What's the matter with you? It's just that he's trying to get his late wife's estate—take it away from her sister.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*with pain and repulsion*): Don't! Please don't! Can't you understand? I don't want to hear such things, Sergei!

BASOV (*offended*): You ought to do something about those nerves of yours, Varya. You behave very strangely—almost insultingly, if you don't mind my saying it.

(*He walks away quickly. Varvara Mikhailovna goes slowly over to the verandah. Noise and laughter from the summer stage.*)

ZAMYSLOV: Watchman! Where's the lantern?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Mr. Somov! Have you got my part?

SEMYONOV: Semyonov, if you don't mind.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: I don't.

ZAMYSLOV: Attention, everybody! We're about to begin!

CURTAIN

## ACT III

*A clearing in the woods. Under the trees in the background a carpet has been spread and bottles and food placed on it. Around the carpet Basov, Dvoyetochiye, Shalimov, Suslov and Zamyslov are sitting. To the right of them and at some distance stands a big samovar, near which Sasha is washing dishes and Pustobaika is stretched out, smoking his pipe. On the ground beside him are a pair of oars, a basket, and a tin pail. Downstage left is a haystack and a stump. Kaleria, Varvara Mikhailovna and Yulia Filippovna are sitting in the hay. Basov is recounting something in a low voice and the men are listening attentively. From time to time can be heard the voice of Sonya, the strumming of a balalaika and guitar coming from offstage right. The day is drawing to a close.*

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: A very dull picnic.

KALERIA: As dull as our lives.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: The men seem to be enjoying themselves.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Probably telling dirty stories after getting nice and mellow.

(*Pause. Sonya*: "Not like that—slower." *The guitar strums. Dvoyetochiye laughs.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: I drank quite a lot myself, but it hasn't cheered me any. On the contrary, a glass of strong wine always sobers me and makes me unhappy. Makes me feel like doing something wildly reckless.

KALERIA (*pensively*): Everything's a blur and a tangle, and I'm afraid.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Of what?

KALERIA: People. They're not to be depended upon—not to be trusted.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: That's true. They're not. I understand you.

(*Basov, with an Armenian accent*: "But why, pet? Couldn't be better!" *A burst of laughter from the men.*)

KALERIA: No, you don't understand me and I don't understand you, and nobody understands anybody else, or cares to. People just drift about aimlessly, like ice floes in a cold northern sea, bumping into each other—

(*Dvoyetochiye gets up and goes off right.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*singing softly*):

Into the glowing water,
Sinks the weary day....

(*When Varvara Mikhailovna begins to speak, Yulia Filippovna stops singing and looks at her intently.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Life is a market-place where everyone is cheating, trying to get as much and give as little as possible.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA:

The vault of heaven darkens,
Soft the shadows steal....

KALERIA: What ought people to do to make themselves less tiresome?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: They ought to be more honest and to have more courage.

KALERIA: They ought to be more definite, Varya. At least their relationships ought to be more definite.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Oh, stop philosophizing! It's not the least bit amusing. Let's sing.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I liked that duet you sang the other day, Yulia Filippovna.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: It was nice, wasn't it? Very sweet and pure. I love all that is sweet and pure. Don't you believe me? I really do: sweet pure sights, sweet pure sounds.... (*Laughs.*)

KALERIA: Indignation is gathering inside me like a big grey cloud in autumn. It's choking me to death, Varya. I don't love anybody, and don't want to. And I'll die an absurd old maid.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Don't say such things, dear. It's so dreary—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Marriage is also a doubtful blessing. If I were you I'd marry Ryumin. He's got a dour disposition, but—(*Sonya*: "Wait! Now you can begin. No, the mandolin first." *The mandolin and the guitar play a duet.*)

KALERIA: He's made of rubber.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: The words of a sad song I used to know keep coming into my head for some reason.

The laundresses who worked with my mother used to sing it. I was just a little girl then—studied at the gymnasium. I remember coming home and finding the laundry full of suffocating steam and seeing the half-naked women bobbing up and down indistinctly and singing in soft, tired voices:

Pity me, oh mother dear,
Weep to see my misery.
Never a glimpse of loving face,
Nothing but endless drudgery. . . .

It used to make me cry. (*Basov*: "Sasha, let's have some more beer—and port.") But they were happy days. The women loved me. In the evenings, when work was over, they'd gather for tea round a big well-scrubbed table. They used to let me sit with them.

KALERIA: What dull things you say, Varya. You and Maria Lvovna.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: It really is awful the way we live now.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*thoughtfully*): Yes, it is. And we don't know what to do about it. My mother worked hard all her life, yet how kind she was, and how cheerful! Everybody loved her. She saw to it that I got an education. I think the day I finished the gymnasium was the happiest in her life. By that time she couldn't walk at all—she was crippled with rheumatism. She died very quietly. "Don't cry, Varya," she said to me. "It's time for me to go. I've lived my life and done my work. It's time." There was more point to her life than there is to mine. I always feel out of place. It's as if I were in a strange country, among strange people. I don't understand this sort of life—the life of the intelligentsia. It's as shaky and temporary as the stalls put up at a fair. Or like the chunks of ice that float on top of the river:

they're hard and they have a shine, but there's a lot of filth frozen into them—a lot that is ugly and shameful. Whenever I read a bold honest book it seems to me that the truth must surely send out warm rays to melt the ice and release the filth frozen into it, so that the waters of the river can wash it all away.

KALERIA (*impatiently*): Why don't you leave your husband? He's a vulgar beast, not nearly good enough for you.

(*Varvara Mikhailovna looks at Kaleria in astonishment.*)

KALERIA (*insistently*): You ought to leave him. Go away and study, or find a lover, or anything else you like, but leave him by all means!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*getting up in disgust*): How very crude, Kaleria!

KALERIA: There's no reason why you shouldn't. Dirt doesn't frighten you. You like laundries and things like that. You could live anywhere.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: The things you say about your brother are simply charming!

KALERIA (*calmly*): If you want me to I can say things quite as charming about your husband.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*laughing*): Do. I don't mind. I often tell him charming things myself, and he pays me back in kind. Quite recently he called me a slut.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What did you say to that?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Nothing. I'm not quite sure what a slut is, but perhaps he has grounds. I'm inquisitive—keenly, morbidly inquisitive about men. (*Varvara Mikhailovna walks away a few paces.*) My great misfortune is that I have a pretty face. When I was only in the sixth form the men teachers used to look at me in a way that made me blush and feel ashamed, and they liked it, and would smile and smack their lips, like gluttons at a feast.

KALERIA (*shuddering*): Ugh, how loathsome!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Isn't it? After that my married friends instructed me. But the person I am most indebted to is my husband. He's the one who really polluted my mind. He's the one who made me inquisitive about men. (*Laughs. Shalimov gets up and comes slowly over to join the women.*) And in return, I pollute his life. There's a saying that goes: Take a handful, give an armful.

SHALIMOV (*coming up*): And a very good saying it is! The man who invented it must have been very kind and generous. Wouldn't you like to take a stroll down to the river, Varvara Mikhailovna?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I would, rather.

SHALIMOV: May I offer you my arm?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: No, thank you.

SHALIMOV: What makes you look so mournful? You're not the least like your brother. He's a jolly fellow—quite amusing.

(*They go out right.*)

KALERIA: There's not a person among us who is happy. Take you, for instance—you're always very lively, but underneath—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Do you like that man? I feel there's something underhand about him. He's as cold and slimy as a frog. Let's go down to the river too.

KALERIA (*getting up*): Let's.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: I think he's interested in her. She really does seem to be a stranger among us. She looks at everybody so strangely—so ... searchingly. What is it she's looking for? I like her, but I'm afraid of her. She's very upright and wholesome.

(*They go out. From the right come loud cries and laughter*: "A boat! Hurry! Where are the oars? Bring the oars!" *Pustobaika gets up very deliberately, puts the oars over his shoulder and*

*is about to go out when Zamyslov snatches them from him. Suslov and Basov run off in the direction of the voices.)*

ZAMYSLOV: Stir your stumps, you lazy devil! Hear those cries? Something may have happened, and you move like a snail! (*Runs off.*)

PUSTOBAIKA (*follows him out, muttering*): That's not the way they'd shout if anything had happened. Thinks himself a hero because he raises a cloud of dust.

(*For a few seconds the stage is empty. Cries are heard*: "Don't throw stones! Hold it! Catch it on the oar!" *Maria Lvovna and Vlas come on left. Both of them are greatly disturbed.*)

MARIA LVOVNA (*in lowered tones*): Leave me alone. I don't want to listen to such a thing. Don't dare repeat it! Have I given you any reason to think you could?

VLAS: I will say it! I will!

MARIA LVOVNA (*holding out both arms as if to push him away*): Have you lost all respect for me?

VLAS: I love you—love you, I say! I love the way you think and feel. I love that strand of grey hair. I love your eyes, the way you talk. I love everything about you—madly, with my whole being!

MARIA LVOVNA: Hush! How dare you?

VLAS: I can't live without you. You're as necessary to me as the air I breathe.

MARIA LVOVNA: Good heavens, must you?

VLAS: You've raised me in my own eyes. You've awakened my self-respect. I was groping in the darkness, without aim or purpose. You taught me to believe in myself.

MARIA LVOVNA: Do go away, don't torture me like this. Don't, dear boy.

VLAS (*on his knees*): You've given me much, but not enough. Be generous, be munificent. I want to believe

that I'm worthy of your love. I beg and implore you not to rebuff me.

MARIA LVOVNA: It's I who implore. Go away. I'll speak to you later. Not now. Get up—oh, please get up!

VLAS (*getting up*): Believe me when I say I can't live without your love. My heart has become so contaminated by contact with these paltry people that I need to cauterize it with some great pure flame.

MARIA LVOVNA: Have you no respect for me at all? After all, I'm an—an old woman. You can't help seeing that. Please go away, please, please!

VLAS: I will if I must. But promise to speak to me later.

MARIA LVOVNA: I will. Later. But now go away.

(*As Vlas goes quickly into the woods left, he runs into his sister.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Careful! What's the matter with you?

VLAS: Sorry.

MARIA LVOVNA (*holding out her arms to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Varya! Come here!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What's the matter? Has he insulted you?

MARIA LVOVNA: No. That is—yes. Insulted? I don't know. I can't tell.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Sit down. Tell me what has happened.

MARIA LVOVNA: He told me—(*Laughs and looks distractedly at Varvara Mikhailovna.*) He told me that he—that he loves me! And I've got grey hair and three false teeth! I'm an old woman! Can't he see that? My daughter is eighteen years old! It's impossible! Absurd!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*moved*): You darling! But compose yourself and tell me everything. You're such a—

MARIA LVOVNA: Such a nothing. Just a woman, like all

the rest. Help me. I've got to refuse him, and I can't. I'll go away.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I see. You feel sorry for him. You can't stand him, poor Vlas.

MARIA LVOVNA: That's not so. It's not him I feel sorry for, it's myself.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*quickly*): But . . . but why?

(*Sonya comes out of the woods and stands for a few seconds behind the haystack. Her arms are full of flowers which she intended to drop upon her mother and Varvara Mikhailovna. She hears what her mother says, takes a few steps towards her, then turns round and softly goes away.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: I love him! Does that sound ridiculous to you? Yes, I love him. My hair is turning grey, and still I want to live life to the full. I'm starved. I haven't had a real taste of life yet. My marriage was three years of torture. Never have I loved anybody before, and now . . . I'm ashamed to admit it, but I long to be loved—loved by someone strong and gentle. Too late! Too late! I know that. That's why I beg you to help me. Convince him that he's mistaken, that he doesn't really love me. I was unhappy once. I suffered terribly. I don't want to again.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: But, darling, I don't understand why you should be so afraid. If you love him and he loves you, why not go through with it? Are you afraid of the future? Who knows how far away that future is?

MARIA LVOVNA: So you think it's possible? What about my daughter? My Sonya? And my years? Curse my age! And this grey hair? He's so very young! He'll leave me before a year is up. Oh, no! I couldn't bear such humiliation!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Why weigh things, why calculate? We're all so afraid to take life as it comes! Why

should we be? But I scarcely know what I'm saying. Perhaps not what I ought to say at all. I don't understand. I keep beating my head against the wall like a big foolish fly against a window-pane, trying to get free. I feel sorry for you. I'd like to see you happy. And I'm sorry for my brother. You could do him so much good! He never had a mother. He's been so terribly wronged and humiliated! You would be a mother to him.

MARIA LVOVNA (*dropping her head*): A mother. Yes, only a mother. I understand. Thank you.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*hastily*): Oh, you didn't understand me! I didn't say—

(*Ryumin comes out of the woods from the right. On seeing the women he stops and coughs into his fist. They do not hear him. He comes closer.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: Without meaning to, you've told me the simple sober truth. I must be a mother to him. A mother and a friend. Oh, darling! I feel like crying. I'll go now. Look, Ryumin is standing there. My face must be a sight. The old lady's had quite a shock.

(*Goes slowly, wearily, into the woods.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm coming with you.

RYUMIN (*quickly*): Just a minute, Varvara Mikhailovna! I won't keep you long.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'll catch you up, Maria Lvovna. Walk in the direction of the watchman's lodge. What is it, Pavel Sergeyevich?

RYUMIN (*glancing about*): I'll tell you in just a minute. (*Drops his head and is silent.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What made you glance about so mysteriously? What's the matter?

(*In the background Suslov crosses the stage from right to left, humming to himself. Basov is heard to say:* "You were going to read us some verse, Vlas. Where are you going?")

RYUMIN: I . . . I won't mince words. You've known me for a long time—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Four years. Has anything happened?

RYUMIN: I'm not quite myself. I haven't the courage to come out with it. I wish that you would . . . that vou would. . . .

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What in the world are you getting at?

RYUMIN: Guess. Do try!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Guess what? Can't you put it simply?

RYUMIN (*softly*): What I have long wanted to tell you. Do you understand now? Now can you guess?

(*Pause. Varvara Mikhailovna frowns and looks coldly at him for a moment, then walks off to one side.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*involuntarily*): What a queer day!

RYUMIN (*softly*): I feel as if I had loved you all my life—even before I ever met you! You were the woman of my dreams, the glorious image youth always creates for itself and searches for—sometimes a lifetime in vain. But I did find you, the woman of my dreams.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*calmly*): Please don't say such things, Pavel Sergeyevich. I don't love you.

RYUMIN: But perhaps . . . allow me to say. . . .

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What? And to what purpose?

RYUMIN: What am I to do? (*Laughs softly.*) So this is the end? How simple! How long it took me to make up my mind to tell you this! With what joy and fear I looked forward to the moment when I would tell you I loved you! And now—it's all over!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm sure I'm very sorry, Pavel Sergeyevich.

RYUMIN: Oh, I understand. But all my hopes were placed in you, in your feeling for me, and now there is no hope left. Nothing left to live for.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Don't talk like that. It hurts me to hear you. Is it my fault?

RYUMIN: Do you think it doesn't hurt me? I'm crushed under the weight of unfulfilled promises. In my youth I swore to myself and to others that I would dedicate my whole life to fighting for what I considered right. Now the best years of my life are over and I haven't done a thing, not a single thing! At first I spent my time getting ready, seeing how the land lay, waiting for the right moment. Before I knew it I had grown accustomed to a tranquil life and liked it—was, in fact, afraid of having it disturbed. Are you aware of how frankly I am speaking? Allow me the pleasure of being sincere for once. I'm ashamed to say all this, and yet there is a pang of pleasure in the shame—the pleasure a believer gets out of confession.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: But ... what can I do to help you?

RYUMIN: It isn't love I ask, but compassion. I am frightened by the persistence with which life presses its demands upon me. I cautiously evade them, hiding behind a screen of various theories. You see that, I know you do. When I first met you a wonderful hope flared up in my heart that you would help me fulfil my promises, that you would inspire me with strength and courage, so that I could devote myself to making life better.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*vehemently, despairingly*): But I can't! Believe me, I can't! I myself am a pauper. I myself am baffled. I keep searching for the meaning of life, but I can't find it. And indeed, do you call this life at all? Is it possible to go on living as we are? My soul cries out for something vital and beautiful, but all I find is the

triviality of our existence. It's horrid, disgusting, shameful to live like this! People are afraid, they clutch at each other, seeking support, they shriek and cry out—

RYUMIN: I, too, seek support. At present I am weak and irresolute, but if you would—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*impulsively*): That's not true! I don't believe it! You just say that to rouse my compassion! Even if I were strong, I couldn't put my own heart in your breast! I don't believe there is any force outside of a man which is capable of transforming him. Either it exists within him, or it doesn't exist at all. But I mustn't go on. I feel myself growing hostile—

RYUMIN: To me? But why?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: No, not to you—to everything. We have estranged ourselves from everything. We don't know how to make ourselves needed. I have a feeling that soon—sooner than we think—a different sort of people—brave, strong people—will take things over and sweep us away like refuse. It's our lies and illusions that make me hostile.

RYUMIN: And I want to live with my illusions. Now that you have scattered them, there is nothing for me to live for.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*repulsed*): Don't bare your soul to me like that. I feel sorry for a pauper if he has been robbed, but not if he has squandered his means or was born a pauper. I can't feel sorry for such a one.

RYUMIN (*offended*): That is cruel. You yourself are sick, you're wounded.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*emphatically, almost proudly*): The wounded are not sick, their bodies are just broken. The sick are those who are poisoned.

RYUMIN: Pity me! After all, I'm a human being.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: And I? Am I not a human being too? Or am I just something you need to make your life easier? Isn't that being cruel? You are not the

only one who made vows and promises in your youth—thousands upon thousands have broken their vows.

RYUMIN (*distracted*): Good-bye. I see that I have spoken too late. But Shalimov, too—take a good look at him—just take a look, and you'll see—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*coldly*): Shalimov? You have no right to—

RYUMIN: Good-bye. I'll say no more. Good-bye.

*(Goes quickly into the woods left. Varvara Mikhailovna takes a step as if to follow him, but with a decided shake of her head stops and sits down on the stump. Suslov enters upstage, near the carpet on which the lunch is spread, and helps himself to a drink. Varvara Mikhailovna gets up and goes off left. Ryumin quickly comes on right, glances about, and with a gesture of despair sinks down on the hay. Suslov, slightly tipsy and whistling to himself, goes over to Ryumin.)*

SUSLOV: Did you hear that?

RYUMIN: What?

SUSLOV (*sitting down*): The argument.

RYUMIN: No. What about?

SUSLOV (*lighting up*): Vlas versus the writer and Zamyslov.

RYUMIN: No.

SUSLOV: A pity.

RYUMIN: Careful, you'll set fire to the hay.

SUSLOV: To hell with it. Yes, quite an argument. But it's all bluff. I once went in for philosophy myself. I, too, used all those fancy words, and I know what they're worth: conservatism, intelligentsia, democracy, and all the rest. Dead words. A pack of lies. Man is first and foremost a zoological phenomenon, and you know it.

Whatever airs he puts on, there's no hiding the fact what he wants most is to eat, drink and have a woman. That's the truth and the whole truth! I understand Shalimov's raving on—he's a writer; playing with words is his profession. And I understand Vlas—he's still young and foolish. But when that polecat of a Zamyslov begins, I feel like jamming my fist down his throat! Have you heard? He's got Basov mixed up in a pretty affair! They'll make a cool fifty thousand out of it, Basov and that swindler, but their reputations are ruined for good. And that haughty Varvara, who can't decide who she wants as a lover—

RYUMIN: That's foul! (*He walks swiftly away.*)

SUSLOV: The wishy-washy ass! (*Pustobaika comes on right, takes the pipe out of his mouth and stares intently at Suslov.*) What are you gaping at? Never seen a man before? Go away!

PUSTOBAIKA: I'm going. (*Walks off slowly.*)

SUSLOV (*Stretching out on the hay*): "Behold the race of humans!" (*Coughs.*) Nothing but a set of rascals underneath. "Money is the root of all evil. . . ." Nonsense! money's nothing—when you've got it. . . . (*Drowsy.*) And to be afraid of what people think of you . . . that's . . . that's for those who are sober . . . all of you are rascals underneath, 'pon my word!

(*Sleeps. Dudakov and Olga stroll on, arm in arm. She is leaning on his shoulder and looking up into his face.*)

DUDAKOV: Both of us were in the wrong. We let our work and worries get the better of us. We mustn't lose respect for each other, Olga. But then I don't know why you should respect me. Who am I?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: My beloved Kirill, father of my children. I do respect you. I love you.

DUDAKOV: I get worn out and let myself go—can't control myself, and you take everything so to heart, and there you are—a row.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: You're the only one I've got in all the world. You and the children. I have nobody at all.

DUDAKOV: Think of the old days, Olga. Was it this sort of life we dreamed of, you and I? (*Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov appear among the trees left.*) Hardly.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: But what's to be done about it? There are the children. We've got to think of them.

DUDAKOV: Yes, the children. I know. But sometimes I think—

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: You poor dear! What *are* we to do?

(*They disappear in the woods.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*coming forward, laughing*): Very solemn and touching! A lesson for me!

ZAMYSLOV: Prelude to the fifth baby—or is it the sixth? And so, Yulia darling, I'm waiting for your answer.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*mockingly*): I don't know what to say now. They were so sweet. Perhaps I, too, should become virtuous; what do you think, ducky?

ZAMYSLOV: Later, Yulia.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Yes, later. My decision is to keep to the path of vice and allow this summer's affair to run its natural course. What were you shouting about with Vlas and the writer?

ZAMYSLOV: Vlas seems to be half-crazy today. We were talking about our beliefs.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: And what do you believe in?

ZAMYSLOV: I? Only in myself, Yulia. And my right to live as I please.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: As for me, I don't believe in anything.

ZAMYSLOV: I was half-starved as a child, and as a youth, too. Starved and mortified. Yes, my dear Yulia,

it's an unpleasant past I have to look back upon. I saw too much hardship and ugliness. I suffered too much. And now I'm the one who is to say how I shall live and what is right and wrong. Well, I must be off. Good-bye, sweetheart. But we must be careful not to be seen too much together.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*with exaggerated sentiment*): What matters it whether we be together or apart, my gallant knight? What have we to fear? We, the mad lovers!

ZAMYSLOV: I'm off, dear! (*Goes into the woods. Yulia Filippovna watches him go, then glances about her with a carefree air. She walks over to the haystack, singing softly*:

As a mother comforts her babe,
So comfort my tormented soul. . . .

(*Suddenly she catches sight of her husband. She stops, shudders, stands for a second gazing at him motionless. Then she makes a movement as if to withdraw, but instead smiles and sits down beside him, tickling his face with a blade of grass. Suslov grunts.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Very musical.

SUSLOV: Who the devil—? Oh, is it you?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: What a breath! A whole stack of hay can't drown out that aroma! Expensive wines will be your ruin, my good man.

SUSLOV (*holding out his arms to her*): You? So close to me? I can't remember when that happened last!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: And there's no point in trying to remember. Look, would you like to do me a favour?

SUSLOV: Just say what it is. You know I'd do anything for you.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: The ideal husband!

SUSLOV (*kissing her hand*): Say what it is. What do you want me to do?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*taking a little revolver out of her pocket*): Let's shoot ourselves, darling. First you, then me.

SUSLOV: What a grim joke, Yulia! Put that ghastly thing down—do, I beg of you.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Wait. Take your hand off! Don't you like my suggestion? But you've already made up your mind to shoot me. I'd shoot myself first, but I'm afraid you'll fool me and remain alive, and I don't want to be fooled a second time, and I don't want to part with you. You and I must be together for ever and ever, amen. Are you glad?

SUSLOV (*overwhelmed*): You can't do that, Yulia—you can't!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Yes, I can. You'll see. Here, do you want me to shoot you?

SUSLOV (*covering his face*): Don't look at me like that. God knows you could do it. I'll go away. I can't stand it.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*gaily*): Go ahead, I'll shoot you in the back. Oh, dear, now I can't. Here comes Maria Lvovna. She's a darling. Why don't you fall in love with her, Pyotr? She has such pretty hair!

SUSLOV (*under his breath*): You'll drive me mad. And why? What have I done to make you hate me so?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*contemptuously*): One can't hate you.

SUSLOV (*softly, gasping*): Why do you torture me like this? Tell me why!

(*Maria Lvovna comes in slowly, lost in reverie. Suslov is standing in front of his wife, his eyes fixed on the revolver in her hand.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Maria Lvovna! Come here! Go away, Pyotr; you've made a vile woman out of me. Go away. Are we going home soon, Maria Lvovna?

MARIA LVOVNA: I don't know. Our party seems to be

scattered all over the place. Have you seen Varvara Mikhailovna?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: She's probably with the writer. I thought you were going down to the river, Pyotr. Go on. We can get on very nicely without you.

(*Suslov goes away without a word.*)

MARIA LVOVNA (*absent-mindedly*): How cutting you are!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: It will do him good. I was told that some philosopher once said a man should take a whip with him whenever he went near a woman.

MARIA LVOVNA: That was Nietzsche.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Was it? He was mad, wasn't he? I don't know any philosophers, mad or otherwise, but if *I* were a philosopher I would say that a woman should take a good stout club with her whenever she went near a man. (*Olga Alexeyevna and Kaleria appear in the background left. They sit down beside the carpet on which the food is spread.*) I was also told there's a tribe of savages who have the following charming custom: before plucking the flowers of delight, they strike the woman over the head with a club. Our people are more civilized —they do it after the wedding. Were you struck over the head with a club?

MARIA LVOVNA: I was.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*smiling*): The savages are more honest, don't you think? But why are you looking so unhappy?

MARIA LVOVNA: Don't ask. Are you unhappy, too?

(*Dvoyetochiye comes on right. He is hatless and carries his fishing-rod.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*laughing*): Has anyone ever heard me complain? I'm always bright and gay. Here comes the uncle. Do you like him? I do, awfully.

MARIA LVOVNA: Yes, he seems pleasant.

DVOYETOCHIYE (*coming over*): I've lost my hat. The young folk set out in a boat to rescue it but only succeeded in sending it to the bottom. Has anyone an extra kerchief I could tie on my head to keep the mosquitoes out of my hair?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*getting up*): Wait, I'll bring you one.

(*Goes to the back of the stage.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: That Vlas was just putting on a show for us. A nice chap.

MARIA LVOVNA: Do you find him amusing?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Oh, very. Sparkles with fun. He read his poetry to us. One of the girls asked him to write something in her album, so he writes: You looked at me, he writes, with laughter in your eyes, and the glance, he writes, went straight to my heart, and so night and day I am pining away ... you know—that sort of thing—

MARIA LVOVNA (*hastily*): Yes, I know. You don't have to go on, Semyon Semyonovich, I know the poem. Tell me, do you intend to stay here long?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Well, here's how it is: I was thinking of settling down with my nephew for good, but he doesn't seem to be any too anxious. There's nowhere else for me to go. I haven't got a soul in the world. Plenty of money, but nothing else.

MARIA LVOVNA (*absent-mindedly and without looking at him*): Are you really, then, so rich?

DVOYETOCHIYE: I've got about a million, if you want to know it—about a million, ha, ha! It'll all go to Pyotr when I die, but that doesn't seem to mean anything to him. He takes no pains to be nice to me. In general he's sort of flabby—there's nothing he seems to want very bad. I can't understand him. Maybe it's because he knows

he'll get the money anyway—why put himself out? Ha, ha!

MARIA LVOVNA (*with more interest*): You poor thing! Why don't you donate your money to some cause? It would be used to better purpose.

DVOYETOCHIYE: There was a young dandy who suggested the same thing, but he rubbed me the wrong way, he did. Gave himself out to be a liberal, but he was nothing but a mountebank, I could see that. To tell you the truth, it does seem a pity to leave all that money to Pyotr. What good'll it do him? He's too puffed up as it is. (*Maria Lvovna laughs and Dvoyetochiye darts a sharp look at her.*) What are you laughing at? Think I'm a fool? I'm not really; it's just that I'm not used to living alone. (*Sighs.*) I groan and moan and my heart's like a stone—it's a sad thing to lose your friends, Maria Lvovna. By the way, I like you. (*Laughs.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: Thank you.

DVOYETOCHIYE: For nothing. It's you who are to be thanked. For instance, you just called me "poor." Ha, ha! I never heard that before. Everybody else calls me rich. Ha, ha! And I myself thought I was rich. But it turns out I'm poor.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*comes up with a kerchief in her hand*): Are you making love, uncle?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Sorry to say I'm out of the running. All I'm capable of at my age is a little sympathy. That's it, tie it in a pretty bow. Think I'll go over and have a bite before we leave.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: There. It's very becoming.

DVOYETOCHIYE: That's a fib. Mine is a manly mug. Will you come with me? By the way, I've been meaning to ask you if you love your husband.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Do you think it's possible to love my husband?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Then what did you marry him for?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: He pretended to be interesting.
DVOYETOCHIYE: Ha, ha! You're the limit!

*(All three go to the carpet at the back of the stage, and the low sound of their talk and laughter accompanies the following scene. Shalimov, Dudakov, Vlas and Basov, who is tipsy, come in left. Vlas goes upstage to join the people round the carpet, the other men go over to the haystack.)*

ZAMYSLOV (*calling from the woods*): Time to go home, everybody!

BASOV: A pretty spot, isn't it, Yakov? A very nice outing, I'd say.

SHALIMOV: You've done nothing all day but sit and drink. You're quite sodden.

*(Sonya, at the carpet, reties the kerchief on Dvoyetochiye's head. Laughter. Zamyslov comes out of the woods near the carpet, picks up a bottle of wine and some glasses, and comes down to Basov. He is followed by Dvoyetochiye, who waves his arms to beat off Sonya.)*

BASOV (*collapsing on the hay*): Think I'll sit down again. It's easier to admire the beauties of nature sitting down. Fact. The woods, the fields, the trees . . . this hay. . . how I love the out-of-doors! (*Maudlin.*) And I love people. I love this big, beggarly, baffling country of ours—Russia, my native land! I love everybody and everything! My soul's as tender as a raspberry! That's a nice figure, Yakov—remember it. You can make use of it sometime—a soul as tender as a raspberry!

SHALIMOV: I'll be sure to make use of it.

SONYA: Semyon Semyonovich! I haven't finished tying it.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Enough of your nonsense. Making a fool out of an old man like me! You've hurt my feelings—ha, ha!

BASOV: Ah, a bottle of wine! Pour me out a glass. This is the life, friends! Life's a joy for those who take it in a simple, friendly way. That's it, friends, you've got to be friendly and trusting if you want to get on in life. You've got to look at things with the frank, trusting eyes of a child, and then everything will be fine. (*Dvoyetochiye, who is standing next to the stump, laughs at Basov's volubility.*) All we have to do, gentlemen, is to look into each other's hearts with the frank, trusting eyes of a child. What's the uncle laughing at? He caught a gay young perch and I went and threw it back into its native element. Because I'm—I'm a pantheist. Fact. And I love perches. And the uncle lost his hat in the river, so there!

SHALIMOV: You're talking through yours, Sergei.

BASOV: Judge not, that ye be not judged. I'm as good a talker as you are. You're an eloquent man, and I'm an eloquent man. Hear that? That's Maria Lvovna talking. Wonderful woman. Deserves to be respected.

SHALIMOV: I don't like machine-guns of her type. And in general I'm not an admirer of women who deserve to be respected.

BASOV (*delighted*): Quite right! Respectable women are worse than the other kind. Fact!

DVOYETOCHIYE: A fine thing for a man to say who's married to a . . . to a very queen.

BASOV: My wife? Varya? Oh, there's a purist for you, there's a Puritan! A saint if there ever was one! But it's no fun to live with her. She reads all the books and is always quoting some sage or other. Let's drink to her health!

SHALIMOV: An unexpected conclusion. But that Maria Lvovna—

BASOV (*interrupting*): Did you know she was having an affair with my clerk? Fact. I caught him in the act of making love to her.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Hm—that, it seems, would be better left unsaid. (*Walks away.*)

BASOV: Oh, yes, I forgot. It's a deep secret.

KALERIA (*coming up*): Sergei, have you seen Varya?

BASOV: Here's my sister. My dear little poetess. Has she read you her poetry, Yakov? Wait till you hear it! All very lofty—clouds, mountains, stars—

KALERIA: You've been drinking, haven't you?

BASOV: Only one glass.

ZAMYSLOV: From *this* bottle.

SHALIMOV: I should like very much to hear what you've written, Kaleria Vasilyevna.

KALERIA: What if I should take you at your word and bring you four fat notebooks?

SHALIMOV: Have no fear, I'm not easily intimidated.

KALERIA: We shall see.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*from the woods*): Time to go home! Time to go home!

(*Kaleria goes out right, meeting Sonya on the way. Zamyslov goes in the direction from which Yulia's voice has come. Basov winks as he watches him go and bends over to whisper something into Shalimov's ear. Shalimov laughs.*)

KALERIA: Ready to go home?

SONYA: Yes, everybody's tired.

KALERIA: Whenever I leave the house I am accompanied by some vague hope. But I always come back disappointed. Have you had the same experience?

SONYA: No.

KALERIA: You will have.

SONYA (*laughing*): You seem to enjoy saying morbid things.

KALERIA: Do I? I should like to throw a disturbing shadow of thought over your bright eyes. I often see you in the company of coarse, dirty people and marvel at your stoicism. Don't you find such people revolting?

SONYA (*laughing*): Their dirt is just on the outside. It washes off with soap and water.

(*Their words become indistinct as they walk to the back of the stage.*)

SHALIMOV (*getting up*): You've got a vicious tongue, Sergei. Be careful—you're a husband yourself.

BASOV: Me?

SHALIMOV: A beautiful spot, but why must there be mosquitoes? I left my rug somewhere.

(*He goes off right. Basov stretches himself and hums a tune. Upstage Sasha, Sonya, and Pustobaika are gathering up the food and dishes. Varvara Mikhailovna comes on left, near the haystack, carrying a bouquet of flowers.*)

VLAS (*from the woods*): Who's going in the boat?

BASOV: Varya! That you? I'm all alone. Everyone's gone and left me.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You've had too much to drink again, Sergei.

BASOV: Oh, not so much.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You shouldn't drink cognac. You'll be complaining of your heart again.

BASOV: I drank mostly port. Don't scold me, Varya. You're always so strict with me, and I'm very sensitive. My love is as soft and tender as a baby's. Sit down beside me, dear, and let's have a heart-to-heart talk. We need to have a good talk, you and I.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Oh, stop it! Everyone's getting ready to go home. Get up and go down to the boat. Get up, Sergei!

Basov: Just as you say. Where am I to go? Down there? Very well.

*(He goes out with too deliberate a step. Varvara Mikhailovna watches him with a stern look on her face. Suddenly she catches sight of Shalimov, who goes quietly up to her with a tender smile on his lips.)*

Shalimov: Your face is drawn and there's a sad look in your eyes. Are you tired?

Varvara Mikhailovna: A little.

Shalimov: I'm very tired. Tired of being with these people. And it hurts me to see you among them. But forgive me.

Varvara Mikhailovna: For what?

Shalimov: Perhaps you object to my saying such a thing?

Varvara Mikhailovna: I would have told you if I did.

Shalimov: I watch you moving silently in the midst of this noisy throng, your eyes seeking the answer to some question. And your silence is more eloquent than words. I, too, have known the chill of loneliness.

Sonya (*shouting*): Mummy! Are you going by boat?

Maria Lvovna (*from the woods*): No, I'm walking back.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*holding out a flower to Shalimov*): Would you like to have it?

Shalimov (*with a bow and a smile*): Thank you. I jealously guard flowers presented to me with such friendly simplicity. (*Vlas [calling from the woods right]*: "Hey, watchman! Where's the other oar?") I'll put it between the pages of a book. Some day in the future I shall find it there and think of you. Does the thought appeal to you? Or is it sentimental?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly, dropping her head*): No. Go on.

SHALIMOV (*gazing curiously into her face*): You must be unhappy among people who are so tragically at a loss.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Teach them how they ought to live.

SHALIMOV: I lack the self-confidence of a teacher. I'm a stranger in this world, a lonely observer of life. I don't know how to make pompous speeches, and nothing I said would have the power of inspiring these people with courage. What are you thinking of?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Me? Thoughts that show people in a repulsive light, and therefore ought to be killed as soon as born.

SHALIMOV: And turn your mind into a graveyard? Wouldn't it be better to simply withdraw from people? Believe me, the air is more clear and wholesome and everything takes on more definite form when one stands at a distance from them.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I see what you mean, and it makes me feel as dejected as if someone very dear to me were incurably ill.

(*Preparations for departure are being made noisily in the woods right.*)

SHALIMOV (*not listening to her*): If you only knew how desperately I mean what I say! You'll hardly believe it, but I must confess that being with you makes me want to be sincere, to be a better and a wiser man.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Thank you.

SHALIMOV (*kissing her hand in agitation*): It is as if when I am standing beside you I were on the threshold of some great happiness, as deep and unplumbed as the sea. As if you possessed some magic power that penetrates others as the power of a magnet penetrates steel.

And a bold, insane idea takes possession of me. It seems to me that if you—

(*He breaks off and glances round. Varvara Mikhailovna watches him closely.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: If I—what?

SHALIMOV: Varvara Mikhailovna . . . you . . . you won't laugh at me, will you? Shall I go on?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: No, I know what you want. You're not a very subtle seducer.

SHALIMOV (*embarrassed*): No, you don't understand. You—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*simply, sadly, softly*): If you ever knew how I loved you when I read your books! How I looked forward to meeting you! I was sure you were great and good and that everything was clear to you. I was sure of it that evening when you read your works at our school—I was only seventeen then. And your image has been shining in my heart ever since, like a bright star.

SHALIMOV (*dully, dropping his head*): Please don't. I apologize.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I would think of you whenever this life got too much for me, and that made it easier to bear. At least there was some hope.

SHALIMOV: Be merciful. Try to understand—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: And then you came here. And you were just the same as everybody else—just exactly the same. How dreadful! What has happened to you? Can't a person ever preserve his strength of spirit?

SHALIMOV (*excitedly*): But why should your demands on me be different from those on other people? Why use a different measuring rod? All of you can live as you please, but I, because I happen to be a writer, must live not as I please, but as *you* please, is that it?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Don't talk like that. And throw my flower away. I gave it to that other, to the one I believed to be above ordinary people. Throw it away.

(*She goes out quickly.*)

SHALIMOV (*watching her go*): I'll be damned! (*Crushes the flower in his hand.*) A spiteful woman!

(*Nervously wipes his face with his handkerchief, then goes off in the direction Varvara Mikhailovna took. Dudakov and Olga come quickly out of the woods left.*)

ZAMYSLOV (*singing in the woods*): "Oh, hasten, night, to draw. . . ."

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*continuing the song*): ". . . thy dark transparent veils. . . ."

VLAS (*in the woods*): For goodness' sake, sit down!

DUDAKOV: We almost got left behind.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I'm so tired! Kirill, darling, you must never forget this day.

DUDAKOV: Nor you—your promise not to give way to your feelings.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: I'm so happy, love! Life is going to be different from now on.

(*They go out. Pustobaika comes on right with a basket over his arm and searches for something on the ground.*)

PUSTOBAIKA: Rubbish everywhere. That's all they leave behind them—waste and rubbish. Just clutter up the earth. (*Goes out left.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*in the woods*): Who else hasn't come?

SONYA: Mummy!

BASOV: Mummy!

MARIA LVOVNA (*comes on left; she looks tired and distracted*): Here I am, Sonya!

SONYA (*running on*): We're going, mummy! But what's the matter with you?

MARIA LVOVNA: Nothing. I'm going to walk. Tell them not to wait for me. Run along.

SONYA (*running off to one side and calling, with her hand to her mouth*): Go ahead, don't wait for us! We're walking. What? Good-bye!

DVOYETOCHIYE (*from the woods*): You'll be worn out.

SONYA: Good-bye!

MARIA LVOVNA: Why didn't you go in the boat with them?

SONYA: Because I wanted to go with you.

MARIA LVOVNA: Well, come along.

SONYA: Let's take a little rest first. Feeling low, mummy? My precious mummy! Sit down here—like this. Let me put my arms round you—like this. Well, now tell me what the trouble is.

(*Laughter, talk, shouts come from the woods.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*from the woods*): Stop rocking the boat!

ZAMYSLOV: No, don't sing. Let them just play.

BASOV (*from the woods*): The musicians are to sit in the bow.

(*The guitar and the mandolin can be heard tuning up.*)

VLAS (*from the woods*): We're off!

MARIA LVOVNA: Sonya, darling! If you only knew!

SONYA (*simply*): I do know.

MARIA LVOVNA: No, you don't.

SONYA: Listen, mumsy—remember how, when I used to cry as a child because I couldn't do my arithmetic

problems, you'd take my head on your breast, like this, and hum a lullaby:

Lulla-lulla-lullaby,
Sleep, my mummy, sleep!

It's you who can't do your problem this time, mumsy dear. If you really love him—

(*Dvoyetochiye laughs.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: Hush, Sonya! How did you find out?

(*The guitar and the mandolin begin to play.*)

SONYA: Sh. Lie still.

Lulla-lulla-lullaby,
Sleep, my mumsy, sleep....

Mine is the cleverest mummy in the world. She taught me to think simply and clearly. He's a dear, mummy—don't send him away. He'll be even better once you take hold of him. You've already produced one first-class human specimen—I really am first class, don't you think? And now you'll produce another.

MARIA LVOVNA: But, darling, it's impossible!

SONYA: He'll be a brother to me. He's inclined to be rude; you'll teach him to be mild and gentle—there's so much gentleness in you! You'll teach him to work with zest, as you work yourself, and as you taught me to work. He'll be a good companion for me, and we'll get on famously together—at first the three of us, and then the four, because I intend to marry that crazy Maxim. I love him, mummy. And he deserves it.

MARIA LVOVNA: You're sure to be happy, you blessed child. You can't help being.

SONYA: Don't get up. He and I will finish studying and we'll live full, interesting, eventful lives. The four of us, mumsy—four brave, honest people!

MARIA LVOVNA: My darling! My joy! The three of us—you and your husband and I. And he—if he wants to join us, it must be as your brother—and my son.

SONYA: And we'll do things worth doing! Oh, we will! But rest a bit first, mumsy. Don't cry.

Lulla-lulla-lullaby,
Sleep, my mummy, sleep!

*(Sonya's voice trembles. In the distance can be heard the music of the guitar and the mandolin.)*

CURTAIN

## ACT IV

*The setting is that of Act II. The sun has already set. Basov and Suslov are playing chess under the pines. Sasha is laying the table for supper on the verandah. The hoarse sounds of a gramophone come from the woods right. Inside the house Kaleria is playing a sad tune on the piano.*

BASOV: What our country needs is well-intentioned people. Such people are evolutionaries. They don't go rushing into things.

SUSLOV: I'm taking your bishop.

BASOV: Go ahead. Well-intentioned people change the forms of life slowly and imperceptibly, but theirs are the only changes that last.

(*Dudakov comes hurriedly out from behind the house.*)

DUDAKOV: Hullo! Is my wife here?

BASOV: Haven't seen her. Sit down, doctor.

DUDAKOV: Can't. Have no time. I've got to get the teachers' report ready for print.

BASOV: If I remember correctly, you've been getting it ready for the past two years.

DUDAKOV (*going out*): Can't be helped if I'm the only person who does anything. There are lots of people

around, but no one to do anything. How do you account for that?

BASOV: A foolish figure that doctor cuts.

SUSLOV: Your move.

BASOV: Hm. What I was saying, was: you've got to be well-intentioned. Misanthropy is a luxury we cannot afford. It's been eleven years since I first arrived in these parts, and all I brought with me was a brief-case and a carpet. The brief-case was empty, the carpet worn thin. And I was thin myself.

SUSLOV: Here goes your queen.

BASOV: Pshaw! How did I ever miss the move of your knight?

SUSLOV: A person who philosophizes always loses.

BASOV: A fact's a fact, as the ducks say.

*(They become absorbed in their game. Out of the woods right come Vlas and Maria Lvovna. They don't see the chess players.)*

MARIA LVOVNA (*softly*): It will soon pass, my dear boy; it will, believe me. And then in the bottom of your heart you will thank me.

VLAS: It's hard. Unspeakably hard.

*(Basov listens, motioning Suslov to be silent.)*

MARIA LVOVNA: Go away. Go quickly, dear. I promise to write to you. Work hard. Make a place for yourself in the world. Be courageous, and never surrender to the trivialities of life. You are fine by nature, and I love you. Yes, I love you. (*Basov grows round-eyed. Suslov looks at him with a smile.*) But my love may injure you, and it frightens me. Yes, I'm not ashamed to admit it—it frightens me. You will soon get over your infatuation, but I—I would only love you the more as time went on, and the end would be comical, even vulgar. At least it would be very painful for me.

VLAS: I swear to you—

MARIA LVOVNA: Don't. I don't want you to.

VLAS: I will always admire you, even if love passes.

MARIA LVOVNA: Ah, that is not enough for a woman who loves. And besides, I'm ashamed to give myself up to personal happiness. That may sound silly and unnatural, but in our times it seems shameful to seek personal happiness. Go away, dear, and if ever the time comes when you need a friend, I shall be waiting for you. You will be as a son to me—a dearly beloved son. Good-bye.

VLAS: Give me your hand. I want to get down on my knees to you. How I love you! I feel like crying. Good-bye.

MARIA LVOVNA: Good-bye, my dear, good friend! Remember my advice: fear nothing and bow down to nothing—ever, ever, ever!

VLAS: Good-bye, my love! My first love, so good and pure. Thank you. (*Maria Lvovna goes quickly into the woods right. Vlas goes toward the house. Suddenly he sees Basov and Suslov and realizes they have overheard. He stops. Basov gets up and bows and is about to say something. Vlas goes up to him.*) Not a word! Not a single word! Don't so much as open your mouth! (*Goes into the house.*)

BASOV (*taken aback*): A ferocious youngster.

SUSLOV (*laughing*): Give you a fright?

BASOV: How do you like that? I knew about it, but I never expected such . . . er . . . lofty sentiments. The silly fools! (*Bursts out laughing. Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov come down the path from Suslov's house. Yulia goes over to her husband, Zamyslov into the house.*)

SUSLOV: She said all that on purpose, just to tighten her hold on the chap.

BASOV: Good Lord, what a comedy, eh?

SUSLOV (*frowning*): She's sly as a fox. Did me a dirty trick. On her advice my uncle gave away all his money.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Pyotr, a man has come—

BASOV (*interrupting*): Ask him what just happened, Yulia Filippovna.

SUSLOV: Who is he?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*to Basov*): What's that? (*To her husband.*) Some contractor. He says it's urgent—something has gone wrong somewhere.

SUSLOV (*going off quickly*): What next?

BASOV: How do you like this, my dear? We're sitting here, your husband and I, and suddenly Maria Lvovna—(*Bursts out laughing.*) It seems that she—that they are in love!

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Who? Maria Lvovna and my husband? (*Laughs.*)

BASOV: No, Vlas. That clown.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Oh, that. Thanks to you, everybody's known that for a long time.

BASOV: But the details! That's what's interesting.

(*From behind the house come Ryumin and Dvoyetochiye, the latter with some parcels in his hands.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: Is Varvara Mikhailovna home? See who I've brought.

BASOV: Back from your wanderings? Glad to see you. Looking fine—a becoming coat of tan, and you've lost some weight. Where have you come from?

RYUMIN: The south. I saw the sea for the first time in my life. How do you do, Yulia Filippovna.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Your looks really have improved, Pavel Sergeyevich. I think I'll take a trip to the seaside, too.

DVOYETOCHIYE: I'm going inside. (*Goes.*) I've brought you a box of chocolates as a farewell gift, niece.

BASOV: I saw the sea.

With greedy eyes I took its measure,
And tested, as I gazed,
My fortitude of spirit.

Isn't that how it goes? Well, well, so here you are! Go into the house, my wife will be glad to see you.

RYUMIN: It's glorious down there. I suppose music is the only thing capable of expressing the majesty of the sea. It dwarfs a man as thoughts of eternity do, making him feel as tiny and insignificant as a straw.

(*Varvara Mikhailovna comes out from behind the house.*)

BASOV: I'll gather up the chess-men. Varya, did you know Pavel Sergeyevich had come back?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Is he here?

BASOV (*going over to her*): Yes. And he seems to have made some additions to his store of pretty phrases. If you only knew what has happened, Varya! Suslov and I were sitting here playing chess, and suddenly Maria Lvovna and Vlas—get what I mean? They really are having an affair! (*Laughs.*) And you were so sure it was something different. Well it isn't, it's just that. Fact!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Stop it, Sergei! I don't want to hear any more of your gossip.

BASOV: But wait, Varya. I haven't told you anything yet—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I asked you not to mention what was happening between my brother and Maria Lvovna, and you told everybody about it. Can't you see how disgusting it is?

BASOV: Confound it all! I had better not talk to you at all, I can see that!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: You certainly had better talk less and think more about what you're doing. You ought

to hear what other people are saying about you, Sergei.

BASOV: About me? It's beneath me to listen to their gossip. Let them say whatever they like. But it surprises me that you, Varya, my wife—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: The honour of being your wife is not as great as you think, and it weighs heavily on me.

BASOV (*indignant*): What are you saying, Varvara?

(*Dvoyetochiye and Vlas come out on the verandah.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm saying what I think, and what I feel.

BASOV: But I must ask you to explain.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I will. Later.

(*With a snort, Basov goes into the house. Vlas follows him with a hostile glance, then sits down on a lower step of the verandah.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: I've brought you some chocolates, Varvara Mikhailovna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Thank you.

DVOYETOCHIYE (*also sitting down on a step*): I've brought all the ladies chocolates, so that they'll remember me kindly. Don't forget you promised to give me your picture.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Oh, yes. I'll go and get it. (*Goes into the house.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: Well, Uncle Vlas, so we're off, are we?

VLAS: I wish we were gone already.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Less than a day left. Hm. If we could only get that sister of yours to come with us! This is no place for her.

VLAS (*glumly*): This is no place for anybody.

DVOYETOCHIYE: I'm glad you're coming with me. Ours is a pretty little town, with a river running through it and woods all round. I've got an enormous house—ten

rooms. Cough in one of them, and the sound goes echoing through them all. It's very lonely there in the winter, with the wind blowing outside. (*Sonya comes quickly on right.*) Loneliness is good for a fellow when he's young, but it's better to have somebody beside you when you're an old codger like me. Ha, ha! (*To Sonya.*) Good-bye, minx! I'm leaving tomorrow, and you'll have forgotten all about me the day after.

SONYA: No, I won't. I couldn't forget you, you have such a funny name.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Is that the only reason? Well, we're grateful for each small thing.

SONYA: Oh, no, that's not the only reason. You're a plain person without any airs, and I like plain people. But you haven't seen my mummy anywhere, have you?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Haven't had the pleasure.

VLAS: She isn't here. Let's go and look for her. Maybe she's in the summer-house, down by the river.

KALERIA: Do you mind if I go with you?

SONYA: Come along.

(*The three of them go into the woods. Dvoyetochiye sighs and hums to himself as he watches them go. Varvara Mikhailovna comes out with a snapshot in her hand. Ryumin comes behind her.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Here's the picture. When are you leaving?

DVOYETOCHIYE: Tomorrow. Thanks for the message. I've quite fallen in love with you, my dear.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Why should anyone love me?

DVOYETOCHIYE: There's no why or wherefore to love. True love's like the sun—you can't tell what it hangs on to.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm not so sure about that.

DVOYETOCHIYE: I can see you're not. Why don't you

come away with me? Your brother's coming. You'd find something for yourself to do there.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What? I don't know how to do anything.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Because you haven't learned. Now you can learn. Vlas and I are going to build two schools—a girls' school and a boys' school—

RYUMIN (*absent-mindedly*): If life is to have meaning, one must do something great and noble, something that will live through the ages: build great temples—

DVOYETOCHIYE: All that highfalutin stuff is beyond me. I didn't even think of the schools, but a kind person came along and put a flea in my ear.

RYUMIN: The very highest institutions of learning offer nothing but a set of contradictory theories, mere hypotheses touching on the mystery of life.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: How tiresome! How trite and commonplace!

RYUMIN (*glancing at all of them and smiling in a queer, quiet way*): I know. Dead words, like autumn leaves. I don't know why I say them. Out of habit, I guess, or because autumn has set in. The contemplative murmur of the green waves has been sounding in my ears ever since I got my first sight of the sea. Everything man has ever spoken is drowned out by that music, like raindrops in the ocean.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: How oddly you speak! What's the matter with you? (*Kaleria and Vlas come out of the woods right.*)

RYUMIN (*laughing*): Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

KALERIA: To stand firmly on your feet means to stand knee-deep in mud.

VLAS: And would you rather hang in the air? All you want is to keep your frock and your soul unsullied. But who has any use for cold immaculate people like you?

KALERIA: I have use for myself.

VLAS: You just think you have.

KALERIA: I don't want to talk to you. You're uncouth. (*Goes into the house.*)

DVOYETOCHIYE: Well, Uncle Vlas, are you pleased with yourself for telling off the young lady?

VLAS (*sits down beside his sister on the lower step of the verandah*): I'm sick of her. (*Imitating her tone.*) "Ah, me! I'm dying of boredom!" I told her a person ought to live with others, but die all by himself.

RYUMIN (*quickly*): Quite right. That may sound cruel, but it's true. Very true.

(*Basov and Yulia Filippovna come out on the verandah.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*as if to herself*): Life passes us by without touching our hearts—merely stirring our thoughts.

BASOV: Varya, I told Sasha we'd have supper out here. (*Suslov comes walking quickly down the path from his house.*) We'll give you a little send-off, Semyon Semyonovich. A good excuse to drink champagne.

DVOYETOCHIYE: I'm quite touched.

SUSLOV: Yulia, please come here a minute.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Why, has something happened?

(*Suslov leads his wife away, whispering something in her ear. On hearing it she starts away from him. He takes her arm and leads her to the right, where they stand talking in undertones for a few seconds, returning to the verandah after Basov has gone away.*)

BASOV: I'll treat you to some first-rate sausage, friends. You've never tasted anything like it. A client sent it to me from the Ukraine. But where's that assistant of mine? (*Under his breath.*) He happens to be the assistant of Yulia Filippovna's husband as well.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*in quiet indignation*): Sergei! That's foul!

BASOV (*defiantly*): But everybody knows it, Varya. I don't see why you should.... Sasha! (*Goes inside.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*gloatingly*): Uncle, a wall of the jail Pyotr just built fell down on two working men.

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*): And she's tickled to death.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*frightened*): Not really! Where did it happen?

SUSLOV: In a little district town.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Congratulations. (*Contemptuously.*) You young folk! I don't suppose you ever went near it while it was being built, did you?

SUSLOV: Yes, I did. It's that rascal of a contractor who's to blame.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: That's a lie. He didn't go near it—not once. He had no time.

DVOYETOCHIYE: What you need's a good walloping. Bah, you young folk! You never do anything right.

SUSLOV (*with a little laugh*): I'll shoot myself, that'll be doing something right.

RYUMIN (*shaking his head*): No, you won't. You'll never shoot yourself.

SUSLOV: And what if I should? All of a sudden?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: What about those two working men, Pyotr Ivanovich? Were they killed?

SUSLOV (*glumly*): I don't know. I'll have to go up there tomorrow.

(*Enter Olga Alexeyevna.*)

VLAS (*out loud*): Revolting.

SUSLOV (*baring his teeth*): Easy there, young man, easy!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*coming up*): Good evening. You're perched about like birds in autumn. I think I've seen everybody today. Oh, Pavel Sergeyevich! When did you get back?

*(Suslov takes his wife aside again and whispers something to her. His face wears an angry look. She gives him a mocking bow and comes back to the verandah. Suslov, whistling defiantly, goes off to his own house. Dvoyetochiye, after a glance at Yulia Filippovna, goes after him.)*

RYUMIN: Today.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: And came straight out here? What a devoted friend you are! Isn't the air oppressive, somehow? Summer will soon be over. We'll all move back to town and there, fenced in by stone walls, we'll be more inaccessible to each other than ever. We'll be quite like strangers.

VLAS (*disapprovingly*): Complaining again!

BASOV (*from the door on to the verandah*): Pavel Sergeyevich! Come here a moment, will you?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*to Vlas*): Well, isn't it the truth?

*(Ryumin goes into the house and meets Kaleria and Shalimov on the way. Without answering Olga Alexeyevna, Vlas gets up and goes over to the pines.)*

SHALIMOV (*with bored indifference*): People expect great things of democracy, but who can say what sort of a beast your democrat is?

KALERIA (*roused*): Yes, yes, you're right; right a thousand times! He's still a beast. A savage, whose one desire is to fill his belly.

SHALIMOV: And wear squeaky boots.

KALERIA: What does he believe in? What is his credo?

VLAS (*irritated*): And yours? What do *you* believe in? What is *your* credo?

KALERIA (*ignoring Vlas*): New inspiration is given to life by people who believe in something. By the aristocrats of the spirit.

VLAS: Who are those aristocrats? Where are they to be found?

KALERIA: I'm not talking to you, Vlas. Come, Yakov Petrovich, let's sit down.

(*They come down off the verandah and sit under the pines, resuming their conversation in lowered tones. Kaleria is nervous, Shalimov calm. His movements are slow and languid, as if he were very tired.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*going over to Vlas*): You're terribly touchy today, Vlas.

VLAS (*dully*): I'm miserable, Varya.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Come down to the river with me, Vlas Mikhailovich.

VLAS: I'd rather not, if you don't mind.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Please do. There's something I must tell you.

VLAS (*going reluctantly*): What is it?

(*Yulia Filippovna takes his arm and whispers something to him as they walk away. Varvara Mikhailovna goes up on the verandah.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*taking Varvara Mikhailovna's arm*): Varya, are you still angry with me?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*pensively*): Angry? No.

VLAS (*in a loud voice from the depths of the stage*): He's a cad! If he weren't my sister's husband—

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Sh! (*Draws him with her into the woods.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*frightened*): Heavens! What has happened?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Our friend Yulia is probably gossiping. But I can see you are still angry, Varya. You ought to realize that what a person says in a moment of irritation—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*pensively*): Do let's forget that, Olga, I don't like things that are patched up—not even friendship.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*getting up*): I didn't think you were one to bear a grudge. Can't you forget? Or at least forgive?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*coldly and firmly*): We forgive too much. That's a weakness. It destroys our respect for one another. There's a certain person whom I forgave so much that now I am as nothing in his eyes.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*after a pause*): Do you mean your husband? (*Varvara Mikhailovna gazes into space without answering.*) How quickly people change! I remember him as a student—poor and gay and carefree. Everybody loved him. But you've hardly changed at all—still so serious and thoughtful. When we heard you were going to marry him, I remember Kirill saying Sergei couldn't go wrong with a wife like you. He said Sergei was frivolous and inclined to be vulgar, but you—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*simply*): Why do you tell me that, Olga? To prove how ineffectual I am?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Varya! How can you think such a thing? It just happened to come to my mind—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly, but very distinctly, as if pronouncing a sentence*): Yes, I'm weak and ineffectual. Is that what you wanted to say? I know it without your saying so, Olga. I've known it for a long time.

SASHA (*on the verandah*): The master's asking for you, Varvara Mikhailovna. (*Varvara Mikhailovna goes without a word into the house.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*following her in*): But you misunderstood me, Varya....

KALERIA (*softly*): For me, a person who thinks he knows the truth is as good as dead. (*Pause. Shalimov smokes.*) Tell me, do you find life a burden?

SHALIMOV: A heavy one at times.

KALERIA: Often?

SHALIMOV: It's never a joy. I've seen too much to be joyful. And the times do not tend to make one joyful.

KALERIA (*quietly*): The life of every thinking person is a great drama.

SHALIMOV: Oh, yes. By the way....

KALERIA: What?

SHALIMOV (*getting up*): Tell me truthfully, do you like my stories?

KALERIA (*eagerly*): Oh, awfully! Especially your latest ones. They are not so realistic, there is less of the gross flesh in them. They are veiled in the tender mists of melancholy that envelop the soul as clouds envelop the sun at sunset. Few are capable of appreciating them, but those few are your ardent admirers.

SHALIMOV (*smiling*): Thank you. Er . . . you were telling me about your poems. Won't you read them to me?

KALERIA: I will. Later. (*Shalimov bows his head in silent acquiescence. Pause. Vlas and Yulia Filippovna come out of the woods right and walk over to the pines. Vlas sits down at the table, puts his elbows on it, and whistles to himself. Yulia Filippovna goes into the house.*) Or perhaps now?

SHALIMOV: What's that?

KALERIA (*with a sad smile*): Have you forgotten already? How soon!

SHALIMOV (*frowning*): Come now . . . let me see....

KALERIA (*getting up*): You asked me to read you my poems. Shall I read them now?

SHALIMOV (*quickly*): Oh, yes, do. Such a beautiful evening! Very appropriate. But you're mistaken: I didn't forget, I was just lost in thought and didn't catch your question.

KALERIA (*going into the house*): Very well, I'll bring them, although I'm sure you won't find them interesting.

SHALIMOV (*following her with his eyes*): I'm sure I will.

(*Karelia runs quickly up the steps, Shalimov lifts his shoulders and makes a face. Turning round, he sees Vlas. Dvoyetochiye and Suslov come down the path leading to Suslov's house. They are silent and seem to be annoyed with each other.*)

SHALIMOV (*to Vlas*): Day-dreaming?
VLAS (*without being rude*): Whistling.

(*Out on the verandah come: Olga Alexeyevna, who sits down in a wicker chair near the railing; Ryumin, who stands beside her while she tells him something in a low voice; Basov, who goes over to the table and examines the food; Varvara Mikhailovna, who stands leaning against one of the pillars; Zamyslov, who takes up a position in front of her.*)

BASOV: Everybody here? Vlas? Maria Lvovna?
VLAS: I'm here.

(*Yulia Filippovna comes out of the house humming to herself, and sits down on one of the steps.*)

ZAMYSLOV: We're all very complicated people, Varvara Mikhailovna.

BASOV (*leaning over the railing*): You here, Yakov? Good.

ZAMYSLOV: It's just because our psychical processes are complicated that we are the elect, the intelligentsia. And you—

(*Dvoyetochiye stands listening to Zamyslov. Suslov, with a glance at the orator, goes over to where Shalimov and Vlas are sitting. Sonya and Maria Lvovna come out of the woods right.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*nervously*): We're not the intelligentsia. We're something quite different. We're just summer folk—people who come and go. We're too busy looking for a cosy nest to settle ourselves in to really do anything—anything, that is, but talk.

BASOV (*mockingly*): You give brilliant proof of your own theory.

(*Kaleria comes out with a notebook in hand, stands beside the table and listens.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*waxing vehement*): And our talk is full of lies. We dress ourselves up in pretty phrases, in tawdry book learning to hide the nakedness of our souls. We talk about the tragedy of life without really living, and we wallow in the pleasure of moaning and complaining.

(*Dudakov comes out on the verandah and stands where his wife cannot see him.*)

RYUMIN (*nervously*): That isn't fair. There is beauty in complaint. It is cruel to doubt the sincerity of a person's lamentations, Varvara Mikhailovna.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I'm sick of hearing them. It's time we had the courage to keep quiet. We have no right to keep talking about our little griefs. We know well enough how to keep quiet when we're content with life, don't we? Each of us nibbles his happiness in secret, but he takes his pricks and pains out into the street to be displayed to everybody and bemoaned from the house-tops. We poison the air with the refuse thrown out of our kitchens. In just the same way we throw out the garbage of our souls. Oh, there's no doubt but that hundreds and thousands of healthy people perish from the poison of our moans and groans. Who ever gave us the right to make a display of our sores?

(*Pause.*)

VLAS (*quietly*): Bravo, Varya!

DVOYETOCHIYE: Very true. Good girl.

(*Maria Lvovna strokes Varvara Mikhailovna's hand in silence. Vlas and Sonya stand beside her. Ryumin jerks his head nervously.*)

RYUMIN: A word. Allow me to speak—for the last time.

KALERIA: It's time we had the courage to keep quiet.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*to Basov*): How boldly and harshly she speaks these days!

BASOV: Thus spake Balaam's—

(*He breaks off and covers his mouth with his hand. Varvara Mikhailovna is too excited to notice, but many of the others hear it. Zamyslov quickly goes down the steps and over to the pines, laughing. Shalimov smiles and shakes his head reprovingly. Vlas and Sonya look at Basov contemptuously. The others pretend not to have heard. A strained silence. Suslov coughs and smiles. Noticing that something is wrong, Varvara Mikhailovna looks anxiously about her.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Did I say something rude—something I shouldn't? Why does everyone act so strangely?

VLAS (*in a loud voice*): It isn't you who was rude.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*with an innocent look*): Why, what's the matter?

MARIA LVOVNA (*quickly and quietly*): Don't Vlas. (*She begins to speak in order to counteract the effect of Basov's words, but warms to her subject as she goes on. Shalimov, Suslov and Zamyslov make a point of not listening to her. Dudakov keeps nodding his head approvingly. Basov looks at her gratefully and signs to the others to listen.*) We ought to be different—all of us. We're the

children of cooks and laundresses, of wholesome working people, and we ought to be different. Never before have Russians of education been connected with the masses by ties of blood. These blood ties ought to fill us with a desire to improve and brighten and expand the lives of those, our kith and kin, who sweat in darkness and dirt from morning to night. Not for pity of them, nor for charity's sake, should we seek to improve life, but for our own sakes, to escape an accursed isolation, to annihilate the yawning precipice out of which our kith and kin gaze up at us on the heights as at their enemies, who live by their labour. They sent us ahead to find a road leading to a better life for all; we went ahead and got lost. And in this isolation of our own creating our lives are filled with alarm and torn by contradictions. That is the real drama of our lives. But we ourselves are to blame for it. We deserve the suffering we have brought on ourselves, and, as you say, Varya, we have no right to poison the air with our groans.

(*Exhausted by her effort, she sits down beside Varvara Mikhailovna. Silence.*)

DUDAKOV (*looking at the others*): There you are. There's the truth for you.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*quickly*): You? Come here.

SHALIMOV (*lifting his hat*): Have you finished, Maria Lvovna?

MARIA LVOVNA: Yes.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*leading her husband over to a corner of the verandah*): Did you hear? Did you understand? What a fool Basov is!

DUDAKOV (*softly*): Why Basov?

(*Movement on the verandah. Varvara Mikhailovna looks round at everybody. No one is sure that Basov's break has been forgotten.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Sh. Varya said a lot of nasty things, and he called her Balaam's ass.

DUDAKOV: He's a blockhead. Listen, Olga, when I left home—

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Wait, Kaleria is going to read her poetry to us. But it's a good thing, I'm glad. Varya's become very high and mighty of late.

*(Ryumin, depressed, goes down off the verandah and begins pacing up and down.)*

SHALIMOV: Attention, everybody! Kaleria Vasilyevna has kindly agreed to read some of her poems to us.

BASOV: Very nice. Begin, dear.

KALERIA (*bashfully*): If you like.

SHALIMOV: Here's a chair.

KALERIA: No, thank you. How do you explain such interest in my poetry all of a sudden, Varya? I'm quite overcome.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I don't know. Somebody must have made an indiscreet remark and everybody's anxious to cover it up.

KALERIA: Well, I'm going to begin. My poems will meet the same fate as your words, Varya. Everything is sucked down into the mire of this life of ours.

Pale, immaculate snow-flakes
Flutter like dead little flowers,
Blown by the breath of autumn
Out of their chilly bowers.

Softly they settle, a coverlet
Drawn o'er the sickly earth,
Hiding its sores 'neath a whiteness
Pure as an infant at birth.

Lifeless the trees and the bushes,
Soulless the days and nights,
Soundless the pale little snow-flakes,
Falling from frozen heights.

(*Pause. Everyone looks at Kaleria as if expecting more.*)

SHALIMOV: Charming.
RYUMIN (*contemplatively*):

Blown by the breath of autumn
Out of their chilly bowers.

VLAS (*impetuously*): I, too, write poetry; I, too, want to read it.
DVOYETOCHIYE (*laughing*): Let's hear!
SHALIMOV: An interesting competition.
VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Must you, Vlas?
ZAMYSLOV: Indeed he must if it's to be amusing.
MARIA LVOVNA: Don't forget, my dear boy: always be yourself. (*All eyes are on Vlas' excited face. Silence.*)
VLAS: I want to prove to you how simple it is to clutter up the minds of your fellow-men with poetry. (*Recites in a strong, clear voice that rings with challenge*):

Little, lugubrious people,
Shrinking from storm and strife,
Wander the earth in search of
A means of escaping from life.

Drab little cowards and liars,
With nothing but moans in their breast,
They hope to get happiness gratis—
Comfort, satiety, rest.

Empty their high-sounding phrases,
Stolen their trivial thoughts—
Little, lugubrious people,
Born of miasmal grots.

*(When he finishes he stands motionless, looking in turn at Shalimov, Ryumin, and Suslov. Pause. Everyone feels uneasy. Kaleria shrugs her shoulders. Shalimov slowly lights a cigarette. Suslov is wrought up. Maria Lvovna and Varvara Mikhailovna go over to Vlas as if to shield him.)*

DUDAKOV (*quietly and distinctly*): Very apt. Quite to the point, I should say.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Bravo! That's the sort of thing I like!

DVOYETOCHIYE: A nice little slap in the face, deuced if it isn't!

KALERIA: Coarse and vicious. What makes him like that?

ZAMYSLOV: Not the least bit amusing, not the least.

SHALIMOV: Did you like it, Sergei?

BASOV: Me? Oh, I don't know—that is, of course, the rhymes are weak, but as a bit of humorous verse—

ZAMYSLOV: It's very serious verse.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*to Shalimov*): You're a past master at pretending.

SUSLOV (*with spleen*): Allow me, one of your "little, lugubrious people," to give my answer to that . . . that . . . I'm sorry, but I don't know what to call that particular genre. But it's not you, Vlas Mikhailovich, that I'll answer. I'll address myself to the source of your inspiration: to Maria Lvovna.

VLAS: What's that? Mind what you're saying!

MARIA LVOVNA (*proudly*): To me? Very odd. But go ahead.

SUSLOV: Not odd at all, for you, I know, are this poet's muse.

VLAS: Don't be a cad.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*gently*): He doesn't know how to be anything else.

SUSLOV: Don't interrupt. When I finish, I'll answer for all I've said. You, Maria Lvovna, are what is called a person of high principles. You've devoted yourself to some mysterious cause—maybe a great one, even a historic one—I can't say, but evidently you think your activities give you the right to look down on other people.

MARIA LVOVNA (*calmly*): That's not true.

SUSLOV: You try to exert influence over everybody, to teach others how they ought to behave. You've made this boy think he has a right to judge others—

VLAS: What piffle are you talking?

SUSLOV (*viciously*): Patience, youngster! I've borne your mocking long enough. What I want to say is, that if we don't live as you think we ought to, respected Maria Lvovna, there's good reason for it. We starved and suffered enough in our childhood. It's only natural that on growing up we should want to eat and drink and enjoy ourselves to our heart's content, that we should want to make up for all the hunger and hardships behind us.

SHALIMOV (*dryly*): And who, may I ask, do you mean by "we"?

SUSLOV (*growing more vehement*): We? You, and I, and he, and all of us. Yes, we're all children of the poor. We all worked and starved in childhood. And now that we're grown up we want to eat and take life easy—that's our psychology. You may not like it, Maria Lvovna, but it's only natural, and nothing else is to be expected of us. The human nature in us comes first, Maria Lvovna, and then all the tinsel and furbishing. And therefore I say, leave us alone! Do you think that by rating us day in and day out, by getting others to rate us, by calling

us cowards and loafers, you can make us social-minded? Oh, no! Not a single one of us—

DUDAKOV: How cheap! Hadn't you better make it short?

SUSLOV (*more vehement than ever*): As for myself, let me say that I'm no child, Maria Lvovna, and there's no sense trying to teach me! I'm a grown man. I'm the ordinary run of Russian—that's it, the ordinary run, and nothing more! That's what I am and what I mean to be. I *like* being it, if you want to know it. I intend to live as I please in spite of all your sermons, your preachings, your lofty ideas!

(*He slaps his hat on to his head and goes off swiftly in the direction of his house. General consternation. Zamyslov, Basov and Shalimov withdraw to one side, whispering together excitedly. Varvara Mikhailovna and Maria Lvovna remain standing together. Yulia Filippovna, Dvoyetochiye, Dudakov and his wife form another group. General distress. Kaleria, depressed, sits alone under the pines. Ryumin walks quickly up and down.*)

VLAS (*going off to one side and clutching his head*): Good God! What ever made me do it?

(*Sonya goes over and says something to him.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: An attack of hysterics. Only a person who is mentally unbalanced could let himself go like that.

RYUMIN (*to Maria Lvovna*): Now do you see how horrible it is to tell the truth?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: How very sad!

DVOYETOCHIYE (*to Yulia Filippovna*): I don't understand a thing—not a thing.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Has he hurt you, Maria Lvovna?

MARIA LVOVNA: Me? Oh, no. Only himself.

DVOYETOCHIYE: A fine state of affairs, ladies and gentlemen! A fine state!

DUDAKOV (*to his wife*): Just a second. (*To Dvoyetochiye.*) An abscess has burst. An abscess of the heart. The same thing might happen to any of us. (*He stammers in his excitement and is unable to go on.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Nikolai Petrovich—

ZAMYSLOV (*coming over*): Has this upset you?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Not in the least. But I don't think I want to stay here. Take me home.

ZAMYSLOV: Idiotic, isn't it? And a pity. The chief had got such a delicious surprise ready for us.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: We've had surprise enough for one day.

(*They go out.*)

SHALIMOV (*going over to Kaleria*): How did you like it?

KALERIA: Horrible! As if the muck had risen from the bottom of a bog and were choking me . . . choking me! . . .

(*Basov goes over to Vlas and takes his arm.*)

VLAS: What do you want?

BASOV (*leading him aside*): A word with you.

RYUMIN (*distracted, going over to Varvara Mikhailovna*): I've been overwhelmed, swept away by this regurgitation of middle-class bile, Varvara Mikhailovna. I'm going away. Good-bye. I only came to say good-bye to you. I wanted so badly to spend a quiet evening together—my last evening! I'm going away forever. Good-bye.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*not listening to him*): Do you know what I've been thinking? Perhaps Suslov is more honest than the rest of you. I mean it. He put it crudely, but what he said was the bitter truth, and nobody else has the courage to say it.

RYUMIN (*recoiling*): Is that all? Is that your farewell? My God! (*He goes into the woods upstage.*)

BASOV (*to Vlas*): Well, you've distinguished yourself, my fine fellow! What's to be done about it now? You've insulted my sister, and Yakov, who's a writer, and a well-known one at that. And Suslov. And Ryumin. You'll have to apologize.

VLAS: Wha-at? Me apologize? To them?

BASOV: Don't take it so hard. Just say you wanted to have some fun and put it on a bit too thick. They'll forgive you—they're used to your tricks—they all know you're eccentric.

VLAS (*shouting*): You go to hell! It's you who are eccentric! A clown, that's what you are!

SONYA: Heavens! Less noise!

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Vlas, what are you saying?

MARIA LVOVNA: We've been caught up in a wave of madness.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Go away, Vlas; go away, lad.

BASOV: Not so fast. It's me he's insulted this time.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Don't, Sergei. Vlas!

BASOV: I'll teach him to call me a clown!

VLAS: It's only respect for my sister keeps me from telling you—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Vlas! Not another word!

(*Kaleria comes up.*)

SASHA (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Shall I serve supper?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Go away!

SASHA (*under her breath, to Dvoyetochiye*): It'd be better to serve it. The master would get over his anger if he saw food on the table.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Get out of here! Shoo!

BASOV (*to Vlas*): I'll teach you! (*Suddenly shouting.*) You young upstart!

KALERIA: Sergei, are you crazy?

BASOV: An upstart, that's what he is!

SHALIMOV (*taking Basov's arm and leading him into the house. Sasha follows them*): Drop it.

MARIA LVOVNA: Vlas Mikhailovich! How could you?

VLAS: Am I to blame? Am I?

SASHA: Shall I serve the supper, Sergei Vasilyevich?

BASOV: Be off with you! I'm nobody here—in my own house! (*Goes inside.*)

MARIA LVOVNA (*to Sonya*): Take him to our place. (*To Vlas.*) Go, Vlas.

VLAS: Forgive me. And you forgive me, sister. It's all my fault. My poor sister! Leave this place. Go away somewhere.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*softly*): Where shall I go?

DVOYETOCHIYE: With us. That would be ripping.

(*Nobody hears what he says. With a deep sigh he turns and goes down the path to Suslov's house.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: You come to my place too, Varya.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I will . . . later. Vlas . . . I'll come.

(*Varvara Mikhailovna goes into the house. Maria Lvovna follows her. Vlas and Sonya go into the woods. Kaleria, crushed, staggers into the house.*)

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: What a scene! And so unexpected! Do you understand how it happened, Kirill?

DUDAKOV: Me? Oh, yes. The time was sure to come when we'd fly at each other's throats. Vlas hit the nail straight on the head, Olga. But it's time for you to go home.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Wait. It's so exciting. Maybe something else will happen.

DUDAKOV: For shame, Olga. And besides, it's really time to go home. The kids are wailing their heads off. Volka screamed at the nursemaid and she's in a huff. He says she pulled his ear. In a word, pandemonium. I told you long ago you ought to go home.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: You did not. You didn't say a word.

DUDAKOV: I did so. Don't you remember, when we were standing up there and you told me something about Basov?

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Not a word! You didn't say a single word!

DUDAKOV: I don't know why you argue with me. I remember distinctly telling you to go home.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: You couldn't have. Only children and servants are told to go home.

DUDAKOV: What a scrappy wench you are, Olga!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Kirill! You promised me you wouldn't let yourself go.

DUDAKOV (*marching away from her*): Oh, bother! It's all so stupid! So like a woman!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*at his heels*): Stupid, you say? Like a woman? (*Tearfully.*) Thank you for that.

(*They disappear in the woods. For a few seconds the stage is empty. Darkness deepens. Basov and Shalimov come out on the verandah.*)

SHALIMOV: You ought to be a bit of a philosopher, old fellow. It's silly to fly off the handle at every little thing.

BASOV: The young upstart! The whipper-snapper! But I hope you're not angry, are you?

SHALIMOV: Oh, we often come up against things like that—couplets written by would-be poets in the trashy papers, but nobody takes them seriously.

(*They come down off the verandah and stand under the pines. Suslov goes over to them quickly.*)

Suslov: Sergei Vasilyevich! I've come back to ... I know I owe you an apology.... (*To Shalimov.*) And you, too, but I just couldn't contain myself. She raises my gorge—simply can't stand her and her kind. Can't stand her face, or her way of speaking, or anything else.

Basov: I understand you, old man; I understand you perfectly. A person ought to show tact and understanding.

Shalimov (*dryly*): You went a little too far.

Basov (*hurriedly*): What of it? I endorse everything he said. In his place I'd have told her—

Suslov: The thing is that all women are actresses—Russian women, tragediennes for the most part. They like to make heroines of themselves.

Basov: Hm, women. It's very hard to get on with them.

(*Varvara Mikhailovna and Maria Lvovna come out on the verandah.*)

Shalimov: We ourselves make it hard. We must simply look upon them as of a lower species.

Basov (*as if voicing another's thoughts*): Quite right. Yes, old fellow, you're right. Women haven't climbed as high in the scale as we have. And if we are to subjugate them to our will, we must use a gentle despotism with them—gentle, but strong, with beauty in the strength.

(*A shot rings out in the woods right. No one pays any attention to it.*)

Suslov: No, all we have to do is keep them pregnant, then we've got them where we want them.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*softly, but forcefully*): How revolting!

Maria Lvovna: Good heavens, there's an odour here like the decay of dead bodies! Come away, Varya!

(*Suslov slinks away, coughing into his hand.*)

BASOV (*hastening over to his wife*): Come now, Pyotr, that's going a little too far—that's stooping pretty low.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*to Shalimov*): You! *You!*

SHALIMOV (*taking off his hat and shrugging his shoulders*): Me, as you see.

MARIA LVOVNA: Come quickly, Varya. Come away. (*Draws her after her. Basov watches them go in dismay.*)

BASOV: Damn it all, they must have heard everything.

SHALIMOV (*with a little laugh*): A fine friend you turned out to be!

BASOV (*vexed and disturbed*): Whatever got into him, the poisonous brute! You can't say a thing like that just anywhere!

SHALIMOV (*dryly*): I'm leaving tomorrow. It's getting damp and chilly out here. Let's go inside.

BASOV (*glumly*): My sister's crying in there, you can be sure.

(*They go inside. Everything is quiet. Pustobaika and Kropilkin come out from behind the house, both of them dressed warmly and carrying whistles and rattles. Someone in Suslov's house is heard to play a few chords on the piano, then Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov sing a duet: "The weary day is dying."*)

PUSTOBAIKA: You show yourself on that path, I'll show myself on this, and then we'll go into the kitchen to have tea with Stepanida.

KROPILKIN: We came out too early; nobody's asleep yet.

PUSTOBAIKA: It's just a matter of showing ourselves. Get along.

KROPILKIN (*going off left*): Off I goes, O Lordy, Lordy!

PUSTOBAIKA: All the rubbish they leave, the swine! Like picnickers, these summer folk—come, clutter things up

and go away, leaving you to sweep and pick up after them.

(*In exasperation he makes a lot of noise with his whistle and rattle. Kropilkin whistles in reply. Pustobaika goes out. Kaleria comes out of the house and sits down under the pines, mournful and pensive. She hums an accompaniment to the singing and nods her head in tune to it. From the woods on the right comes the voice of Pustobaika.*)

PUSTOBAIKA (*in alarm*): Who are you? What? Good Lord!

(*Kaleria listens with a startled look on her face.*)

PUSTOBAIKA (*leading in Ryumin*): Is it to the Basovs' you want to go?

KALERIA: Sergei! Sergei!

RYUMIN: A doctor! Call a doctor!

KALERIA: Pavel Sergeyevich! You? What happened? What's the matter with him?

PUSTOBAIKA: I goes down the path and sees him crawling towards me on the ground. Says he's wounded.

KALERIA: Wounded? Sergei, go for Maria Lvovna! He needs a doctor, quick!

BASOV (*running out of the house*): What's the matter? What has happened?

RYUMIN: Forgive me.

KALERIA: Who wounded you?

PUSTOBAIKA (*muttering*): Who'd wound a person here? Nobody but himself. Here's the weapon. (*Takes a revolver out of the breast of his coat and surveys it calmly.*)

BASOV: You? I thought it was Zamyslov. I thought Pyotr had—(*Runs off, calling.*) Maria Lvovna!

SHALIMOV (*wrapped in a rug*): What? Has something happened?

KALERIA: Are you in great pain?

RYUMIN: I'm ashamed. Frightfully ashamed.

SHALIMOV: Perhaps it isn't dangerous?

RYUMIN: Take me away from here. I don't want her to see me. Take me away, please do.

KALERIA (*to Shalimov*): Go and call somebody. Why do you stand there?

(*Shalimov hurries off to the Suslovs' house. The noise of people running, excited outcries. Maria Lvovna, Varvara Mikhailovna, Sonya and Vlas come in.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: You? Sonya, help me. Take off his jacket. Quiet, quiet, don't get excited.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Pavel Sergeyevich!

RYUMIN: Forgive me. I intended to end it once and for all, but when a person's heart is very small and is beating very hard, it's not easy.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: But why? Why?

KALERIA (*to Ryumin, hysterically*): How cruel of you! (*Catching herself.*) But what am I saying? Forgive me.

VLAS (*to Kaleria*): Go away, you shouldn't see things like this. Go away.

(*She goes over to the pines. Dvoyetochiye, hatless, in a vest without a jacket and with a topcoat thrown over his shoulders, comes running in with Suslov; behind them come Zamyslov, Yulia Filippovna, Dudakov, untidy and irritable, and Olga Alexeyevna, meek and dismayed.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: Here's the wound, I don't think it's serious.

RYUMIN: People are coming. Varvara Mikhailovna, give me your hand.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: But why?

RYUMIN: I love you. I can't live without you.

VLAS (*between his teeth*): Damn you and your love!

KALERIA (*in a loud whisper*): How dare you say such a thing! How dare you give a final blow to one who is dying!

MARIA LVOVNA (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Go away. (*To Ryumin.*) You have nothing to fear, the wound is a trifle. Here's another doctor.

DUDAKOV: What is it? A gun wound? In the shoulder? Why shoot yourself in the shoulder? You want to do it in your left side, or in your temple, if you're really serious.

MARIA LVOVNA: Think what you're saying, Kirill Akimovich!

DUDAKOV: Quite. I beg your pardon. Bandaged him up? Good. Take him inside.

BASOV: Into our house. Our house, Varya?

RYUMIN: Don't lift me. I can walk.

DUDAKOV: Can you? Good.

RYUMIN (*staggers away, supported by Basov and Suslov*): I made a hash out of my life and couldn't even die gracefully. A pathetic specimen.

(*They lead him into the house. Dudakov goes with them.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: He's right.

ZAMYSLOV (*drearily*): What a sorry farce!

PUSTOBAIKA (*to Dvoyetochiye*): I'm the one as found him.

DVOYETOCHIYE: Good for you. Very good indeed.

PUSTOBAIKA: Oughtn't I to get something for my pains?

DVOYETOCHIYE (*reproachfully*): You unfeeling man! (*Gives him a coin.*)

PUSTOBAIKA: Thanks.

KALERIA (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Is he going to die? I'm the one who should have done that, aren't I, Varya?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Hush. Don't say such things. (*Hysterically.*) What disgusting creatures we are! Why, oh why?

SHALIMOV (*to Maria Lvovna*): Is it a dangerous wound?

MARIA LVOVNA: No.

SHALIMOV: It's all very unpleasant. Varvara Mikhailovna, allow me—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA (*starting*): What?

SHALIMOV: Just a few minutes ago you heard me say— (*Basov, Suslov and Dudakov come on.*)

BASOV: We've put him to bed.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Leave me alone! I don't believe you; I don't want to hear your explanations. I hate all of you with all my heart! You're miserable, contemptible monstrosities!

VLAS: Wait, sister, let me tell them. I know what they are—they're mummers. And I'll spend the rest of my life tearing off the costumes they wear to cover up their lies, their vulgarity, the poverty of their feelings and the obscenity of their thoughts!

(*Shalimov shrugs his shoulders and walks off to one side.*)

MARIA LVOVNA: Stop it. It won't do the least good.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: No, let them hear. I've paid dearly for my right to tell them what I think of them! They've twisted my soul out of shape and ruined my life. Was I like this before? There's nothing I believe in any more—nothing at all. I have no strength left, and nothing to live for. Is that what I used to be? That's what they've brought me to.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*agonizedly*): I, too, can say that!

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA (*to her husband*): Look at Varya. Take a good look at her face. Did you ever see anything so vicious?

(*Dudakov shakes off his wife's arm.*)

BASOV: Don't, Varya. Must we have this? After all, nothing in particular has happened. Ryumin has done a foolish thing, but is it worth—?

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Don't come near me, Sergei!

BASOV: But, darling—

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: I never was your darling, or you mine. We have never been anything to each other but husband and wife. Now there is nothing at all between us. I am going away.

BASOV: Where? For shame, Varya! In front of everybody! Out in the street, so to speak—

(*Suslov stands motionless at the back of the stage.*)

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: There's nobody here.

MARIA LVOVNA: Come away, Varya.

YULIA FILIPPOVNA: Don't interrupt her. Let her have her say.

DVOYETOCHIYE (*bitterly*): Ah, good folk, you've upset me bad today, indeed you have.

KALERIA (*to Maria Lvovna*): What is it? Do you understand what's happened?

MARIA LVOVNA: Calm yourself. Help me take her away.

VARVARA MIKHAILOVNA: Yes, I'm going away—as far away as possible from this place where everything is rotten and corrupt. Away from these people with nothing to do. I want to live! And I intend to live. To live and work—to undo the harm you've done. (*Looks at them and cries out in despair.*) May you be accursed forever!

VLAS: Come, sister. Don't. You've said enough. (*Leads her away.*)

BASOV (*to Shalimov*): This is outrageous! Why don't you help me do something about it?

SHALIMOV (*sarcastically*): Give her a glass of cold water. What else can you do?

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*going over to Varvara Mikhailovna*): If only I could go away too!

BASOV: Varya! Where are you going? I wouldn't have expected this of you. Maria Lvovna! You're a doctor. You ought to do something to quiet her nerves.

MARIA LVOVNA: Don't talk to me.

DVOYETOCHIYE (*to Basov*): Tck! A fine one you are!

(*Follows Varvara Mikhailovna and Vlas into the woods right.*)

KALERIA (*sobbing*): And me? What is to become of me?

SONYA (*going over to her*): Come to our house. (*Leads her away.*)

YULIA FILIPPOVNA (*with grim tranquillity*): Well, Pyotr Ivanovich, let's go on living.

(*Suslov grins and follows her.*)

BASOV: What's happening? Everyone suddenly gone clean off their chumps! Was there ever an idiot like that Ryumin? Just because his nerves happened to be unstrung.... Why don't you say something, Yakov? What are you laughing at? Do you think it'll all pass over? It happened so suddenly—bang!—and everything blown to smithereens. What are we to do now?

SHALIMOV: Take it easy, old fellow. It's nothing but a display of oratory inspired by hysterics.

(*Takes Basov's arm and leads him to the house. Dudakov, with his hands clasped behind him, comes out of the house and goes slowly to the right where his wife is waiting for him under the trees.*)

BASOV: Damnation!

SHALIMOV (*mockingly*): Come, come. The Suslovs, as

you see, have decided to go on living; let us calmly do the same.

OLGA ALEXEYEVNA: Kirill, is he going to die?

DUDAKOV (*testily*): No. Come along. Nobody's going to die.

(*They go into the woods.*)

SHALIMOV: It's all so unimportant, old fellow. Everything. People as well as events. Pour me out a glass of wine. So utterly meaningless, old fellow. (*Drinks. From the woods comes the long low whistle of the watchman.*)

CURTAIN

# ENEMIES

## (SCENES)

23—977

## CHARACTERS

ZAKHAR BARDIN, *aged 45*

PAULINA, *his wife, aged 40*

YAKOV BARDIN, *aged 40*

TATYANA, *his wife, aged 28, an actress*

NADYA, *Paulina's niece, aged 18*

PECHENEGOV, *a retired general, uncle of the Bardins*

MIKHAIL SKROBOTOV, *aged 40, a merchant, partner of the Bardins*

CLEOPATRA, *his wife, aged 30*

NIKOLAI SKROBOTOV, *his brother, aged 35, prosecuting attorney*

SINTSOV, *a clerk*

POLOGY, *a clerk*

KON, *an ex-soldier*

GREKOV
LEVSHIN
YAGODIN
RYABTSOV
AKIMOV
} *Workmen*

AGRAFENA, *the housekeeper*

BOBOYEDOV, *captain of gendarmes*

KVACH, *a corporal*

AN ARMY LIEUTENANT

CHIEF OF POLICE

A POLICEMAN

*Gendarmes, soldiers, workmen, clerks, servants*

## ACT I

*A garden shaded by large ancient limes. In the depths of the garden stands a white army tent. Under the trees to the right is a wide seat made of turf with a table in front of it. Another table laid for breakfast stands under the trees to the left. A small samovar is boiling. Wicker chairs are placed about the table. Agrafena is making coffee. Kon is standing under a tree smoking a pipe and talking to Pology.*

POLOGY (*speaking with clumsy gestures*): Of course, you know better. I'm a person of no importance; my life is insignificant enough. But every cucumber was raised with my own hands, and no one shall steal them without answering to me for it.

KON (*sullenly*): Nobody's asking your permission.

POLOGY (*pressing his hand to his breast*): But listen, if somebody takes your property, haven't you a right to ask the protection of the law?

KON: Go ahead and ask. Today they take your cucumbers, tomorrow your head. There's your law for you!

POLOGY: That's a strange thing to hear you say, and even dangerous. How can you, a retired soldier wearing

the Order of St. George, allow yourself to speak so contemptuously of the law?

KON: There is no law. There's only a command. L-e-f-t face! Forwar-r-rd march! And off you go. When they say "halt!" it means halt.

AGRAFENA: You might stop smoking that makhorka, Kon; it's enough to make the leaves curl up.

POLOGY: If they stole because they were hungry, I might be able to excuse them. Hunger justifies a great many things; one might say that all villainy was done for the sake of satisfying hunger. When a man wants to eat, then of course—

KON: The angels don't eat, but Satan went against God just the same.

POLOGY (*happily*): I would call that mere mischief-making.

(*Enter Yakov Bardin. He speaks quietly, and as though he were listening to his own words. Pology bows to him. Kon gives a careless salute.*)

YAKOV: Hullo. What are you doing here?

POLOGY: I've come to Zakhar Ivanovich with a modest request.

AGRAFENA: He's come to complain. Last night some fellows from the factory stole his cucumbers.

YAKOV: That so? You'll have to tell my brother.

POLOGY: Exactly. It's to him I'm going.

KON (*glumly*): I don't see you going anywhere. Just standing here and grumbling.

POLOGY: I'm not interfering with you any, am I? If you were reading the paper or something, then of course you might accuse me of interfering.

YAKOV: Kon, I want to speak to you.

KON (*crossing over*): You're a stingy son of a gun, Pology, an old pettifogger.

POLOGY: Spare your words. Man was given a tongue for the making of complaints.

AGRAFENA: Oh, stop it, Pology. You're more like a mosquito than a human being.

YAKOV (*to Kon*): What's he doing here? Why doesn't he go away?

POLOGY (*to Agrafena*): If my words offend your ear and fail to touch your heart, I shall be silent. (*He goes out, sauntering down the path, touching the trees as he passes.*)

YAKOV (*embarrassed*): Well, Kon, it seems I hurt somebody's feelings again yesterday?

KON: I'm afraid you did.

YAKOV (*walking up and down*): Humph! Very strange. Why do I always insult people when I'm drunk, Kon?

KON: Sometimes people are better drunk than sober. They're braver, drunk—not afraid of anybody; don't even spare themselves. We used to have a noncom in our company who was a tattletale and a toady when he was sober, and always getting into a fight. When he was drunk he would cry like a baby. "Brothers," he would say, "I'm a man like the rest of you. Spit in my eye, brothers," he would say. And some of them did.

YAKOV: Who was it I insulted yesterday?

KON: The public prosecutor. You called him a blockhead. And then you told him the director's wife had a string of lovers.

YAKOV: Think of that, now! As if it was any business of mine!

KON: Certainly. And then—

YAKOV: Very well, Kon; that's enough. I don't want to know how many people I've insulted. It's all that accursed vodka! (*Goes over to the table and stares at the bottles; then he pours himself out a tall glass of wine and sips it. Agrafena glances at him out of the corner*

*of her eye and sighs.*) You feel just a little bit sorry for me, don't you?

AGRAFENA: It's such a pity. You're so plain and simple with everybody. Not at all like most gentlefolk.

YAKOV: But Kon here doesn't pity anybody. He only philosophizes. It takes a lot of abuse to make a person begin to think, isn't that right, Kon? (*From the tent comes the voice of the General, crying*: "Hey, Kon!") I guess you've had rather rough treatment and that's why you're so smart.

KON (*leaving*): The very sight of that General is enough to turn me into an idiot.

GENERAL (*emerging from the tent*): Kon! To the river! Lively! (*They disappear in the garden.*)

YAKOV (*sitting and rocking back and forth on a chair*): Is my wife still sleeping?

AGRAFENA: No, she's up and had a swim.

YAKOV: So you pity me, eh?

AGRAFENA: You ought to take treatments.

YAKOV: Well, pour me out a drop of cognac.

AGRAFENA: Perhaps I oughtn't to, Yakov Ivanovich?

YAKOV: Why oughtn't you? Refusing me one drink won't do me any good.

(*With a sigh, Agrafena pours him out a large glass of cognac. Mikhail Skrobotov enters in a state of excitement. He pulls nervously at his pointed black beard and toys with the hat in his hand.*)

MIKHAIL: Is Zakhar Ivanovich up? Not yet? I might have known as much! Give me . . . is there any cold milk? Thanks. Good morning, Yakov Ivanovich! Have you heard the news? Those rascals are insisting that I fire foreman Dichkov. They threaten to stop working if I don't, devil take them.

YAKOV: Go ahead and fire him.

MIKHAIL: That would be easy enough, but you see—that's not the point. The point is that concessions demoralize them. Today they demand that I fire the foreman, tomorrow they'll want me to hang myself for their amusement.

YAKOV (*gently*): You think they'll wait for tomorrow to want that?

MIKHAIL: You seem to find it funny. I'd like to see you try to handle those grimy gentlemen—about a thousand of them with their heads turned by all kinds of people, including your dear brother with his liberalism, and a pack of idiots who write leaflets. (*Looks at his watch.*) Almost ten o'clock, and they threaten to begin the fun after lunch. Oh yes, Yakov Ivanovich, your brother certainly made a nice mess of things at the factory while I was away on leave. He completely demoralized the men with his lack of firmness.

(*Sintsov comes on right. He is about thirty years old. There is something calm and impressive in his face and figure.*)

SINTSOV: Some representatives from the workers have come to the office and demand to see the owner, Mikhail Vasilyevich.

MIKHAIL: Demand? Be good enough to send them to the devil! (*Paulina comes on left.*) Forgive me, Paulina Dmitriyevna.

PAULINA (*graciously*): You have a habit of swearing. But what is the occasion this time?

MIKHAIL: It's all this "proletariat"! They "demand"! Formerly they came to me with dutiful "requests."

PAULINA: I must say you're very harsh with people.

MIKHAIL (*making a futile gesture with his hands*): There you are!

SINTSOV: What shall I tell the representatives?

MIKHAIL: Let them wait. Go back.

(*Sintsov goes out unhurriedly.*)

PAULINA: That man has an interesting face. Has he been working for us long?

MIKHAIL: About a year.

PAULINA: He gives the impression of being well-bred. Who is he?

MIKHAIL (*shrugging his shoulders*): Earns forty rubles a month. (*Looks at his watch, sighs and glances about, catching sight of Pology under one of the trees.*) What are you doing here? Have you come for me?

POLOGY: No, Mikhail Vasilyevich, I've come to see Zakhar Ivanovich.

MIKHAIL: On what business?

POLOGY: In respect to a violation of property rights.

MIKHAIL (*to Paulina*): This is a new employee with a bent for gardening. He is firmly convinced that everything on earth was created for the sole purpose of injuring his interests. Everything annoys him—the sun, England, new machinery, the frogs—

POLOGY (*smiling*): Allow me to observe that the frogs annoy everybody when they begin croaking.

MIKHAIL: Get back to the office! What's this habit you have of dropping everything and coming to complain? I won't have it. Be off with you!

(*Pology bows and leaves. Paulina smiles and stands watching him through her lorgnette.*)

PAULINA: How strict you are! He's an amusing type. It seems to me that Russians are more original than people of other nationalities.

MIKHAIL: If you said more *ab*original I'd agree with you. I've been managing men for fifteen years, and that

has given me an excellent understanding of the noble Russian people as painted by our clerical writers.

PAULINA: Clerical?

MIKHAIL: Your Chernyshevskys, Dobrolyubovs, Zlatovratskys, Uspenskys.... (*Looks at his watch.*) What a long time Zakhar Ivanovich is in coming!

PAULINA: Do you know what's keeping him? He's finishing last night's chess game with your brother.

MIKHAIL: And down at the factory they're threatening to quit work after lunch! You can be sure that no good will ever come of Russia, and that's a fact. It's a land of anarchy! People have an organic disgust for any kind of work and a complete inability to maintain order. There's not the slightest respect for law!

PAULINA: But that's only natural. How can there be respect for law in a country where there is no law? Between you and me, our government—

MIKHAIL: Oh, I'm not justifying anybody. Not even the government. Take the Anglo-Saxons. (*Zakhar Bardin and Nikolai Skrobotov come in.*) There could be no better material from which to build a state. An Englishman prances before the law on his hind legs like a circus horse. He has a feeling for law in his very bones and muscles. Good morning, Zakhar Ivanovich! Hullo, Nikolai! Allow me to inform you of the latest result of your liberal policy: the workers are demanding that I fire Dichkov immediately. They threaten to walk out after lunch if I don't. How do you like that?

ZAKHAR (*rubbing his forehead*): Hm, Dichkov? The fellow who's always using his fists and going after the girls? Of course we'll have to fire him. That's fair enough.

MIKHAIL (*excitedly*): Good Lord, can't you talk seriously? It's not a question of justice, but of policy. Justice is Nikolai's province. Your conception of justice, let me repeat, is ruinous to business.

ZAKHAR: But how can that be? That's a paradox.

PAULINA: Talking business in my presence! And so early in the morning!

MIKHAIL: Sorry, but I've got to. This matter must be made clear. Before I went on leave, I held the factory in my hand like this (*holds up a tight fist*), and nobody dared to let out so much as a peep! As you know, I never saw anything beneficial in these Sunday amusements—reading circles and the like—under our conditions. The raw Russian mind is not illuminated by the light of reason when a spark of knowledge falls upon it. It only smokes and smoulders.

NIKOLAI: One should always speak calmly.

MIKHAIL (*restraining himself with difficulty*): Thanks for the advice. It is perfectly sound, but unfortunately I cannot accept it. In six months, Zakhar Ivanovich, your attitude towards the workers has shaken and undermined the firm structure which it took me eight years to build up. I had won the respect of all the men. They looked upon me as their master. Now it is clear that there are two masters, a good one and a bad one. You, of course, are the good one.

ZAKHAR (*embarrassed*): But . . . er . . . I don't understand you.

PAULINA: That's a very strange thing to say, Mikhail Vasilyevich.

MIKHAIL: I have reasons for saying it. You have placed me in an idiotic position. The last time this question came up I told the workers I would close down the factory sooner than fire Dichkov. They saw I meant what I said and they became resigned. On Friday, Zakhar Ivanovich, you told that fellow Grekov that Dichkov was a roughneck and you meant to fire him.

ZAKHAR (*conciliatingly*): But, my dear fellow, he goes around punching people in the jaw and that sort of thing. Surely we can't allow it. We're Europeans. We're civilized.

MIKHAIL: First of all, we're factory owners. On

every holiday the workers beat each other up; what business is that of ours? But you'll have to postpone teaching the workers good manners for the present. At this very moment their representatives are waiting for you in the office and they will demand that you fire Dichkov. What do you intend to do?

ZAKHAR: Do you find that Dichkov is so indispensable?

NIKOLAI (*dryly*): It seems to me this is not a question of an individual. It's a matter of principle.

MIKHAIL: Exactly! It's a question of who is master at the factory—you and I, or the workers.

ZAKHAR (*at a loss*): I understand, but....

MIKHAIL: If we give in to them this time, there's no knowing what they'll demand next. They're a brazen lot. Six months of these Sunday schools and other things have done their work. They glare at me like wolves, and some leaflets have put in an appearance. It savours of socialism.

PAULINA: Socialism in an out-of-the-way place like this! It sounds almost funny, doesn't it?

MIKHAIL: Does it? My dear Paulina Dmitriyevna, children are amusing as long as they are small. But gradually they grow up, and all of a sudden you find yourself face to face with full-grown rascals.

ZAKHAR: What do you intend doing?

MIKHAIL: Closing down the factory. Let them go hungry for a while and they'll cool off. (*Yakov gets up, goes over to the table and has a drink, then he goes slowly off.*) As soon as we shut down, the women will put in an appearance. They'll begin to cry, and women's tears act like smelling salts on those who are dizzy with dreams. They immediately bring them to their senses.

PAULINA: That's a harsh thing to say.

MIKHAIL: Perhaps, but life demands such harshness.

ZAKHAR: But... er... such a measure—do you think it's absolutely necessary?

MIKHAIL: Can you suggest anything else?

ZAKHAR: What if I go and speak to them?

MIKHAIL: You are sure to give in to them, and then my position will be intolerable. Your wavering, if you'll forgive my saying so, is almost an insult to me. To say nothing of the harm it does.

ZAKHAR (*quickly*): But, my dear fellow, I don't object. I'm just trying to think it out. You must understand I am more of a country gentleman than an industrialist. This is all so new to me, and so complicated. I want to see justice done. Peasants are more gentle and good-natured than workmen. I get on famously with them. To be sure there are some interesting types among the workers, but on the whole I agree with you. They are too presumptuous.

MIKHAIL: Especially since you have made them so many promises.

ZAKHAR: As soon as you left I began to notice a sort of restlessness; there were even disturbances. Perhaps I was not very cautious, but the workers had to be quieted down. Things have been written about us in the papers, and very sharp things, I must say.

MIKHAIL (*impatiently*): It is now seventeen minutes past ten. We've got to come to some decision. As the matter stands, either I close down the factory or I withdraw from the firm. We will not suffer any loss if the factory is closed down. I have taken the necessary measures. All our rush orders are ready and we have reserve stocks in the warehouses.

ZAKHAR: Hm. Must it be decided immediately? Oh, yes Well, what do you think, Nikolai Vasilyevich?

NIKOLAI: I agree with my brother. If we value civilization, we must hold strictly to principles.

ZAKHAR: That is, you also think we should close down! What a pity! My dear Mikhail Vasilyevich, please don'

be offended with me. I shall give you my answer in, let's say, ten minutes. Will that do?

MIKHAIL: Quite.

ZAKHAR: Please come with me, Paulina.

PAULINA (*following her husband*): Goodness, how unpleasant all this is!

ZAKHAR: In the course of centuries the peasant has developed an inherent respect for the gentry.... (*They go out.*)

MIKHAIL (*through his teeth*): The milksop! He can say that after the agrarian massacres in the south! Fool!

NIKOLAI: Easy, Mikhail! Why should you let yourself go like that?

MIKHAIL: My nerves are shot to pieces, can't you see? I'm going to the factory, and... look! (*Takes a revolver out of his pocket.*) They hate me, thanks to that idiot. But I can't drop everything. You would be the first one to blame me if I did. All our capital is in that factory. If I withdraw, that bald-headed idiot will ruin everything.

NIKOLAI (*calmly*): That's bad, if you're not exaggerating.

SINTSOV (*entering*): The workers are asking for you.

MIKHAIL: For me? What do they want?

SINTSOV: There are rumours the factory will be closed down after lunch.

MIKHAIL (*to his brother*): Hear that? How did they find out?

NIKOLAI: Probably Yakov Ivanovich told them.

MIKHAIL: Damn it all! (*Looking at Sintsov with an irritation he cannot suppress.*) Why are you so concerned, Sintsov? Coming here—asking questions—

SINTSOV: The book-keeper asked me to come for you.

MIKHAIL: He did, did he? Where did you get that habit of staring and grinning? What are you so happy about?

SINTSOV: That, I think, is my own business.

MIKHAIL: I don't agree. And I advise you to show more respect in the future, do you hear?

(*Sintsov fixes him with his eye.*)

MIKHAIL: Well, what are you waiting for?

TATYANA (*coming on right*): Oh! The director! In a hurry as usual? (*Calling to Sintsov.*) Hullo, Matvei Nikolayevich!

SINTSOV (*warmly*): Good morning. How do you feel? Aren't you tired?

TATYANA: Not in the least. Only my arms ache from rowing. Are you going to the office? I'll go with you as far as the gate. Do you know what I want to tell you?

SINTSOV: Hardly.

TATYANA (*walking beside Sintsov*): You said lots of clever things yesterday, but you spoke too emotionally, too pointedly. The more unemotionally some things are said, the more convincing they are. (*Their talk becomes inaudible.*)

MIKHAIL: How do you like that? The employee I have just called to account for his impudence flaunting his intimacy with Yakov's wife in my face! He's a drunkard and she's an actress. Why they ever came here the devil only knows.

NIKOLAI: She's a strange woman—good-looking, well-dressed, rather tempting—and yet she seems about to have an affair with that pauper. Highly original, but foolish.

MIKHAIL (*ironically*): That's what you call being democratic. She's the daughter of a village teacher, you know, and she says she always feels drawn to the common people. Damn it all, I wish I had never got myself mixed up with these country gentlemen!

NIKOLAI: I don't think you should complain. You're the head of this business.

MIKHAIL: Not yet, but I *will* be.

NIKOLAI: I have an idea she's easy pickings. Seems very sensual.

MIKHAIL: That liberal of ours—he must have gone back to bed. No, Russia will never get anywhere, I tell you. People wander about in a daze talking and day-dreaming. Nobody knows his place in life. As for the government—it's made up of malicious morons who don't understand anything and can't do anything.

TATYANA (*returning*): Are you shouting too? For some reason everyone has begun to shout.

AGRAFENA: Zakhar Ivanovich is asking for you, Mikhail Vasilyevich.

MIKHAIL: At last! (*Goes out.*)

TATYANA (*sitting down at the table*): What is he so upset about?

NIKOLAI: You would hardly find it interesting.

TATYANA (*calmly*): He reminds me of a policeman who often used to be on duty in our theatre in Kostroma: tall and thin, with bulging eyes.

NIKOLAI: I fail to see the resemblance to my brother.

TATYANA: I'm not speaking of a physical resemblance. This policeman, too, was always in a hurry. He never walked; he ran. He never smoked; he gobbled up cigarettes. He had no time to live at all. All his time was taken up by rushing somewhere, but not even he knew where.

NIKOLAI: Do you think he really didn't know?

TATYANA: I'm sure he didn't. When a person has a clear purpose, he pursues it calmly. That fellow was always rushing. And it was a special kind of a rush. Something seemed to be goading him on, and in his hurry he got in his own way and everybody else's. He wasn't greedy—not in the narrow sense. He was only greedily anxious to get rid of all his duties, including the duty to take bribes. He didn't *take* bribes—he *snatched* them, and in such haste that he even forgot to say thank you. Finally he was run over and killed by a carriage.

NIKOLAI: Do you wish to imply that my brother's energy is directed to no purpose?

TATYANA: Is that the impression you got? It isn't what I wanted to say. Your brother simply reminds me of that policeman.

NIKOLAI: Not very complimentary, I should say.

TATYANA: I had no intention of paying your brother compliments.

NIKOLAI: You have an unusual manner of flirting.

TATYANA: Have I?

NIKOLAI: And not a very gay one.

TATYANA (*calmly*): Is it possible for a woman to be gay with you?

NIKOLAI: Come, now!

PAULINA (*coming in*): Nothing seems to go right today. Nobody is having breakfast, nobody seems to have got enough sleep. Early this morning Nadya went to the woods for mushrooms with Cleopatra Petrovna. Yesterday I asked her not to. Dear me! How difficult everything is!

TATYANA: You eat too much.

PAULINA: Why that tone, Tanya? Your attitude toward people is abnormal.

TATYANA: Really?

PAULINA: It's easy enough to take things calmly when you have nothing, and so are free of all responsibility. It's quite a different thing when nearly a thousand people depend on you for their food.

TATYANA: Stop feeding them, let them live as they like. Turn over everything to them—the factory, the land, and live in peace.

NIKOLAI (*lighting up*): From what play did you get that?

PAULINA: I don't know why you should say such things, Tanya. You should see how upset Zakhar is. We have decided to close down the factory for a while, until the workers come to their senses. But just imagine how hard

it will be! Hundreds of people will be thrown out of work. And they have children. It's horrible!

TATYANA: Why do you do it if it's so horrible? Why torture yourselves?

PAULINA: Oh, Tanya! How irritating you are! If we don't close down, the workers will go on strike, and that will be even worse.

TATYANA: What will?

PAULINA: Everything. We certainly can't concede all their demands. And actually they aren't their demands. It's just that a pack of Socialists have put ideas into their heads and so they go about shouting. (*Fervently.*) I can't understand it! Abroad, socialism is in its proper place and its leaders conduct activities quite openly. But with us, here in Russia, they get the workers off in corners and whisper to them, ignoring the fact that socialism is out of place in a monarchy! It's a constitution we need, and not socialism. What do you think, Nikolai Vasilyevich?

NIKOLAI (*with a short laugh*): I take a slightly different view of it. Socialism is a very dangerous phenomenon. And it is bound to find fertile soil in a country which has no independent . . . er . . . so to speak, race philosophy; in a country where everything is borrowed on the run. We are extremists. That is our weakness.

PAULINA: Oh, that's true enough! We are extremists.

TATYANA (*getting up*): Especially you and your husband. And the prosecutor here.

PAULINA: What do you know about it, Tanya! Zakhar is considered to be a Red in our gubernia.

TATYANA (*walking up and down*): I think he only turns red from shame, and not very often at that.

PAULINA: Tanya! What in the world has got into you?

TATYANA: Why, have I offended you? I didn't mean to. Your life, it seems to me, is like an amateur performance. The roles have been wrongly assigned, nobody has any

talent, everyone acts abominably. And the play doesn't make sense.

NIKOLAI: There is some truth in what you say. Everyone complains that the play is boring.

TATYANA: We ourselves make it so, and the extras and the stage hands are beginning to see it. Some day they'll drive us off the boards.

(*Enter the General and Kon.*)

NIKOLAI: Aren't you carrying it a little too far?

GENERAL (*calling*): Paulina! Some milk for the General! See that it's ice cold! (*To Nikolai.*) Hullo, you old coffin of laws! Your hand, my charming niece! Kon, recite your lesson: what is a soldier?

KON (*bored*): Whatever his superior wants him to be, sir.

GENERAL: What if he wants him to be a fish, eh?

KON: A soldier must be able to be anything.

TATYANA: My dear uncle, you amused us with this scene yesterday. Must we have it every day?

PAULINA (*with a sigh*): Every day after his swim.

GENERAL: Yes, indeed, every day. And always something different. That old joker should make up the questions and answers himself.

TATYANA: Do you enjoy it, Kon?

KON: The General enjoys it.

TATYANA: And you?

GENERAL: He enjoys it too.

KON: I'm too old for the circus, but once you've got to eat, you've got to grin and bear it.

GENERAL: You sly old rascal! Right about face! For-war-r-d march!

TATYANA: Don't you ever get tired of making fun of that poor old man?

GENERAL: I'm an old man myself. But I get tired of you all right. An actress should be entertaining, but you certainly are not.

PAULINA: Uncle, do you know—?

GENERAL: I know nothing.

PAULINA: We're closing down the factory.

GENERAL: What? Good for you! No more whistles! Early every morning, right in the middle of a sound sleep—o-o-O-O! That's right, close it down!

MIKHAIL (*entering quickly*): Nikolai, just a minute! (*Taking him aside.*) The factory is closed down, but we had better take measures, just in case. Send a telegram to the Vice-Governor; tell him briefly the situation and ask him to send soldiers. Sign my name.

NIKOLAI: He's my friend as well.

MIKHAIL: I'm off to send those representatives to the devil. Don't tell anyone about the telegram. I'll tell them myself when the time comes. You won't?

NIKOLAI: I won't.

MIKHAIL: It makes you feel fine to have things your own way! I'm older than you in years, but younger in spirit, don't you think?

NIKOLAI: It's not youth, but nervousness, if you ask me.

MIKHAIL: I'll show you whether it's nervousness or not. You'll see! (*Goes out laughing.*)

PAULINA: So they've decided to do it, Nikolai Vasilyevich?

NIKOLAI (*going out*): Seems so.

PAULINA: Good heavens!

GENERAL: What have they decided to do?

PAULINA: To close down the factory.

GENERAL: Oh, that. Kon!

KON: Here, sir.

GENERAL: The fishing-rods and the boat!

KON: Everything's ready.

GENERAL: I'm off to be amused by the fish. I prefer it to being abused by humans. (*Laughing.*) Well put, eh? (*Nadya runs in.*) Ah, my pretty butterfly! What's up?

NADYA (*happily*): We've just had an adventure! (*Turning back, she calls.*) Do come here please! Grekov! Don't let him go, Cleopatra Petrovna! Just as we were coming out of the woods, auntie, we suddenly came upon three drunken workmen.

PAULINA: There now! I warned you—

CLEOPATRA (*followed by Grekov*): Can you imagine anything more disgusting!

NADYA: Why disgusting? It was so funny! Three workmen, auntie, all of them bowing and smiling and saying, "Good morning, dear ladies!"

CLEOPATRA: I shall certainly ask my husband to dismiss them.

GREKOV (*smiling*): What for?

GENERAL (*to Nadya*): Who is that... er... smudge-face?

NADYA: He's the one who saved us, grandfather, don't you see?

GENERAL: No, I don't.

CLEOPATRA (*to Nadya*): As though anyone *could*, the way you tell it.

NADYA: I tell it just the way it was.

PAULINA: It's impossible to make head or tail out of what you're saying, Nadya.

NADYA: Because you keep interrupting me! They came up to us and said, "Let's sing a song, shall we?"

PAULINA: What impertinence!

NADYA: Nothing of the kind! "We heard that you sang very well," they said. "Of course," they said, "we're a little tipsy, but we're better that way." And it's the truth, auntie. When they're drunk they aren't sullen, as they usually are.

CLEOPATRA: Fortunately for us, this young man—

NADYA: I tell it better than you do! Cleopatra Petrovna began scolding them—and you needn't have, I'm sure you needn't! And then one of them, the tall thin one—

CLEOPATRA (*grimly*): I know who he is.

NADYA: . . . took her by the hand and said in such a sad voice: "You're such a pretty well-bred lady, it's a pleasure just to look at you. Why should you scold? Have we done anything to hurt you?" He said it so nicely—from his very heart! But then another one, a gruff one, said: "Why do you talk to them? As if they could understand anything! They're not people, they're beasts!" Us—beasts! She and I. (*Laughs.*)

TATYANA (*laughing*): You seem to be very pleased with the title.

PAULINA: What did I tell you, Nadya? If you insist on running off to all sorts of places—

GREKOV (*to Nadya*): May I go now?

NADYA: Oh, no. Please don't. Won't you have some tea? Or milk? Please do!

(*The General laughs. Cleopatra shrugs her shoulders. Tatyana watches Grekov and hums quietly. Paulina drops her head and concentrates on the spoons she is wiping.*)

GREKOV (*smiling*): No, thank you, I don't care for anything.

NADYA (*insisting*): Don't be bashful. These are all very nice people, really.

PAULINA (*protestingly*): Nadya!

NADYA (*to Grekov*): Don't go yet. I haven't finished telling about it.

CLEOPATRA (*displeased*): In a word, this young man put in a timely appearance and talked his drunken friends into leaving us in peace. I asked him to see us home, and that's all there is to tell.

NADYA: Oh, the way you tell it! If it had been that way it would simply have been tiresome!

GENERAL: Well, now, what are we to make of this?

NADYA (*to Grekov*): Sit down! Auntie, why don't you

invite him to sit down? And what are you all so glum about?

PAULINA (*to Grekov, from where she is sitting*): I am very grateful to you, young man.

GREKOV: Don't mention it.

PAULINA (*more dryly*): It was very good of you to defend these young women.

GREKOV (*calmly*): There was no need to defend them. No one wanted to do them harm.

NADYA: Auntie! How can you say such a thing!

PAULINA: Don't try to teach your elders!

NADYA: But of course nobody defended anybody. He simply said to them, "Leave them alone, comrades. That isn't nice." They were so glad to see him! "Grekov!" they cried. "Come along with us! You're a clever chap!" And he really is clever, auntie. Forgive me, Grekov, but that's the truth.

GREKOV (*smiling*): You have placed me in a very embarrassing position.

NADYA: Have I? I didn't mean to. It isn't me, it's them, Grekov.

PAULINA: Nadya! I can't endure your exuberances. You make yourself ridiculous. But enough of this!

NADYA (*excitedly*): Laugh if I'm so funny! What are you sitting there like owls for? Go ahead and laugh!

CLEOPATRA: Nadya has a talent for making mountains out of molehills—and doing it very noisily. That's particularly unpleasant now, in front of a stranger who, as you see, is laughing at her.

NADYA (*to Grekov*): Are you laughing at me?

GREKOV (*simply*): Not at all. I am admiring you.

PAULINA (*overwhelmed*): What? Uncle—

CLEOPATRA (*with a short laugh*): There you are!

GENERAL: Enough of this! Good things in little doses. Here, young man, take this and be off.

GREKOV (*turning away*): Thank you, but that is quite unnecessary.

NADYA (*covering her face with her hands*): Oh! How could you!

GENERAL (*stopping Grekov*): Wait a minute! I'm offering you ten rubles!

GREKOV (*calmly*): What of it?

(*For a second all are silent.*)

GENERAL (*confused*): Er . . . a . . . who are you anyway?

GREKOV: One of the workers.

GENERAL: A smith?

GREKOV: No, a fitter.

GENERAL (*sternly*): That's all the same. Why don't you take this money, eh?

GREKOV: Because I don't want it.

GENERAL (*irritated*): Nonsense. What *do* you want?

GREKOV: Nothing.

GENERAL: Maybe you'd like to ask the hand of the young lady, eh?

(*He laughs. Everyone is embarrassed.*)

NADYA: Oh! Think what you're saying!

PAULINA: Please, uncle—

GREKOV (*calmly, to the General*): How old are you?

GENERAL (*amazed*): What? Me? How old?

GREKOV (*in the same tone*): Yes. How old are you?

GENERAL (*glancing about*): I'm . . . er . . . sixty-one. What do you want to know that for?

GREKOV (*leaving*): You're old enough to have more sense.

GENERAL: What? More sense? Me?

NADYA (*running after Grekov*): Please—please don't be angry. He's just an old man. They're really very nice people. Honest to goodness.

GENERAL: What the devil do you call this?

GREKOV: Don't trouble yourself. This is only what is to be expected.

NADYA: It's just because of the heat. It's put everyone in a bad mood. And I told about our adventure so badly.

GREKOV (*smiling*): They wouldn't have understood no matter how you told it.

(*They disappear.*)

GENERAL (*overwhelmed*): How dared he say such a thing to me!

TATYANA: You had no business to offer him money.

PAULINA: Oh Nadya! That Nadya!

CLEOPATRA: The nerve of him! There's a proud Spaniard for you! I'll certainly ask my husband to—

GENERAL: A puppy, that's what he is!

PAULINA: Nadya's impossible! Walking off with him like that! She upsets me so!

CLEOPATRA: These Socialists of yours keep getting more impudent every day.

PAULINA: What makes you think he's a Socialist?

CLEOPATRA: I can see it. All the decent workers are Socialists.

GENERAL: I'll tell Zakhar to throw that young upstart out of the factory on his ear.

TATYANA: The factory is closed.

GENERAL: On his ear just the same!

PAULINA: Tanya, go and call Nadya. That's a dear. Tell her I'm simply overwhelmed.

(*Tatyana goes off.*)

GENERAL: The scum! "How old?"—eh?

CLEOPATRA: Those drunkards had the impertinence to whistle at us. And you pamper them with reading circles and the like!

PAULINA: Just imagine, on Thursday I had to go into the village, and all of a sudden I heard someone whistling

at me. Even at me! They might have frightened the horses, to say nothing about the insult of it!

CLEOPATRA (*pedantically*): Zakhar Ivanovich is much to blame! He doesn't place the proper distance between himself and those people, as my husband says.

PAULINA: He's too soft-hearted. He wants to be kind to everyone. He thinks that keeping on good terms with the common people is advantageous to both sides. In respect to the peasants, he is right. They lease the land and pay rent, and everything runs smoothly. But these.... (*Enter Tatyana and Nadya.*) Nadya! Can't you understand, darling, how improper—

NADYA (*hotly*): It's you who were improper! You! The heat has affected you—made you hot and irritable. You don't understand a thing! As for you, grandfather—oh dear, how stupid you are!

GENERAL (*infuriated*): Me? Stupid? Must I listen to this a second time?

NADYA: Why did you say that about... about asking for my hand? Aren't you ashamed?

GENERAL: Ashamed? Well, that's the limit! I've had just about enough for one day! (*Goes out shouting at the top of his voice.*) Kon! The devil take the likes of you! Where under the sun have you got to, you dolt, you dunderhead!

NADYA: And you, auntie! You! You travel abroad and make fine speeches about politics! Not to have invited him to sit down, not to have offered him a cup of tea!

PAULINA (*jumping up and throwing down a spoon*): This is impossible! Do you realize what you're saying?

NADYA: And you too, Cleopatra Petrovna! On the way back you were sweet and polite to him, but as soon as we got here—

CLEOPATRA: What was I supposed to do, kiss him? Sorry, but his face was dirty. By the way, who ever gave you the right to reprove me? There you are, Paulina

Dmitriyevna. There's your democracy for you, or what do they call it—humanism? And my husband is the one who has to answer for it all. But you'll have to answer for it too, you'll see!

PAULINA: I really must apologize, Cleopatra Petrovna, for Nadya's behaviour—

CLEOPATRA (*leaving*): Quite unnecessary. It isn't a question of only Nadya. You're all to blame!

PAULINA: When your mother was dying, Nadya, and entrusted me with your upbringing—

NADYA: Don't speak of my mother! You never say the right things about her!

PAULINA (*in amazement*): Nadya! Are you ill? Think of what you're saying. Your mother was my sister. I knew her a bit better than you did.

NADYA (*unable to restrain her tears*): You don't know anything. Poor people and rich people have nothing in common. My mother was poor, but she was good! You don't understand poor people! You don't even understand Aunt Tanya!

PAULINA: I must ask you to leave, Nadya. Go at once!

NADYA (*as she goes off*): Very well. But I am right just the same. I'm right and you're wrong.

PAULINA: Good heavens! A strong, healthy girl having a fit like this all of a sudden! Almost hysterics! Forgive me, Tanya, but I'm afraid you've been having a bad influence on her. You talk to her about everything as though she were a grown-up. You take her among our employees—those people from the office—those queer workers. That's absurd, you know. And then these boating parties—

TATYANA: Don't take it so hard. Perhaps you'd better have a drink or something. There's no denying that you didn't show much tact with that worker. Nothing would have happened to the chair if you had asked him to sit on it.

PAULINA: You're all wrong. Certainly nobody can accuse me of having a wrong attitude towards the workers. But everything within limits, my dear!

TATYANA: And I don't take her anywhere, in spite of what you say. She goes herself, and I don't consider it necessary to stop her.

PAULINA: Herself! As if she understood what she was doing!

(*Yakov enters slowly, slightly drunk.*)

YAKOV (*sitting down*): There's going to be trouble at the factory.

PAULINA (*long-sufferingly*): Stop it, Yakov Ivanovich!

YAKOV: Yes, there is. There's going to be trouble. They're going to burn down the factory and roast us all in the fire—like rabbits.

TATYANA (*with vexation*): You've been drinking already!

YAKOV: I've always been drinking by this hour. I just saw Cleopatra. There's a low woman for you! Not because she's got so many lovers, but because there's a vicious old dog sitting right where her heart ought to be.

PAULINA (*rising*): Everything was going along so nicely, and then all of a sudden—(*Walks aimlessly about the garden.*)

YAKOV: Vicious and mangy. Not a big dog, but a greedy one. There it sits, baring its teeth. It's gobbled everything up, but it wants more, and it doesn't know what. That makes it restive.

TATYANA: Hush, Yakov! Here comes your brother.

YAKOV: What do I care? I realize very well, Tanya, that it's impossible to love me any more, and that hurts. Yes, it hurts, but it doesn't stop me from loving you.

TATYANA: You had better freshen yourself up a bit. Go and have a bathe.

ZAKHAR (*entering*): Have they announced that the factory is being closed down?

TATYANA: I don't know.

YAKOV: No, they haven't, but the workers know it anyway.

ZAKHAR: How? Who told them?

YAKOV: I did. I went and told them.

PAULINA (*coming up*): Why did you do that?

YAKOV (*shrugging his shoulders*): Just for the fun of it. They're interested. I tell them everything—everything they'll listen to. I think they like me. They enjoy knowing that their boss's brother is a drunk. It impresses them with the idea of the equality of men.

ZAKHAR: Hm. You often go to the factory, Yakov, and of course I have nothing against it. But Mikhail Vasilyevich says that sometimes when you are talking with the workers you criticize the management.

YAKOV: That's a lie. I don't understand anything about management. Or mismanagement.

ZAKHAR: He also says that sometimes you bring vodka with you.

YAKOV: That's a lie. I don't bring it; I send for it, and not sometimes but every time. They wouldn't pay any attention to me if I didn't give them vodka.

ZAKHAR: But, Yakov, judge for yourself—after all, you're the owner's brother.

YAKOV: That's not my only shortcoming.

ZAKHAR (*offended*): Very well, I'll say nothing more. Nothing. For some reason I find myself surrounded by hostility—

PAULINA: Very true. You should have heard what Nadya just said!

POLOGY (*running in*): Allow me to report... the director... they have just killed the director!

ZAKHAR: What!?
PAULINA: You . . . what did you say?
POLOGY: Killed him outright. He fell down—
ZAKHAR: Who? Who shot him?
POLOGY: The workers.
PAULINA: Did they catch them?
ZAKHAR: Is there a doctor there?
POLOGY: I don't know.
PAULINA: Yakov Ivanovich! Go immediately.
YAKOV (*with a helpless gesture*): Where?
PAULINA: How did it happen?
POLOGY: The director was excited. He kicked one of the workers in the stomach.
YAKOV: They're coming here.

(*Confusion. Mikhail Skrobotov is led in by Nikolai and Levshin, a bald middle-aged worker. Several workers and office employees come with them.*)

MIKHAIL (*in a tired voice*): Let go of me. Put me down.
NIKOLAI: Did you see who did the shooting?
MIKHAIL: I can't . . . go on. . . .
NIKOLAI (*insistently*): Did you notice who did the shooting?
MIKHAIL: You're hurting me. Some red-headed fellow. Put me down. A red-headed fellow.

(*They place him on the turf seat.*)

NIKOLAI (*to a Policeman*): Do you hear? A red-headed fellow.
POLICEMAN: Yes, Your Honour.
MIKHAIL: What difference does it make now?
LEVSHIN (*to Nikolai*): Wouldn't it be better not to trouble him for the present?

NIKOLAI: Hold your tongue! Where's the doctor? I'm asking you where the doctor is!

(*Everyone starts whispering and moving about aimlessly.*)

MIKHAIL: Don't shout.... The pain.... Let me rest.

LEVSHIN: That's right, rest a bit, Mikhail Vasilyevich. Ah, me! It's all a matter of money, this life of ours! Money's our breath, money's our death.

NIKOLAI: Policeman! Ask everyone who doesn't belong here to leave.

POLICEMAN (*in a low voice*): Be off, fellows. Nothing to watch here.

ZAKHAR (*quietly*): Where's the doctor?

NIKOLAI: Misha! Misha! (*Bends over his brother; the others do likewise.*) I'm afraid, it's all over.

ZAKHAR: Impossible! He's just fainted!

NIKOLAI (*slowly and quietly*): No, he's dead. Do you understand what that means, Zakhar Ivanovich?

ZAKHAR: But... but maybe you're mistaken.

NIKOLAI: I'm not. *You're* the one responsible for this. *You!*

ZAKHAR (*overwhelmed*): Me?

TATYANA: How cruel... and absurd!

NIKOLAI (*aggressively*): Yes, you!

CHIEF OF POLICE (*running in*): Where's the director? Is he seriously wounded?

LEVSHIN: He's dead. He, as was always making others stir themselves—just look at him now.

NIKOLAI (*to the Chief of Police*): He managed to tell us that the fellow who killed him was a red-head.

CHIEF OF POLICE: A red-head?

NIKOLAI: Yes. You must immediately take measures.

CHIEF OF POLICE (*to the Police Sergeant*): Round up all the red-heads.

POLICEMAN: Yes, sir.

CHIEF OF POLICE: See that you don't miss anybody!

(*The Policeman goes out.*)

CLEOPATRA (*running in*): Where is he? Misha! What's the matter, has he fainted? Nikolai Vasilyevich, has he fainted? (*Nikolai turns away.*) Is he dead? Is he?

LEVSHIN: He's quiet now. He threatened them with his pistol, but the pistol was turned against himself.

NIKOLAI (*angrily, under his breath*): Get out of here! (*To the Chief of Police.*) Take this fellow away!

CLEOPATRA: The doctor—what does the doctor say?

CHIEF OF POLICE (*under his breath to Levshin*): Clear out, you!

LEVSHIN (*quietly*): I'm going. No need to shove.

CLEOPATRA (*quietly*): Have they killed him?

PAULINA (*to Cleopatra*): Darling!

CLEOPATRA (*quietly but vengefully*): Don't touch me! This is your work! Yours!

ZAKHAR (*despondently*): I understand that this is a dreadful blow to you, but why . . . why say such a thing?

PAULINA (*tearfully*): Oh, my dear, think what you're saying!

TATYANA (*to Paulina*): You had better not stay here. Where's the doctor?

CLEOPATRA: It's your accursed softness that killed him!

NIKOLAI (*dryly*): Come, Cleopatra, Zakhar Ivanovich is well aware of his guilt without your rubbing it in.

ZAKHAR (*despondent*): But.... I don't understand. What are you saying? How can you make such an accusation?

PAULINA: This is horrible! Such lack of feeling!

CLEOPATRA: Lack of feeling? You poisoned the workers against him, you destroyed his influence over them. They used to be afraid of him. They used to tremble at the very sight of him. And now they've killed him. And it's you, *you* who are to blame. His blood is on your hands!

NIKOLAI: Enough of this. You mustn't shout.

CLEOPATRA (*to Paulina*): Crying, are you? Good. Go ahead and cry! Cry all his blood out of your eyes!

POLICEMAN (*coming out*): Sir—

CHIEF OF POLICE: Sh!

POLICEMAN: All the red-heads are rounded up.

(*Through the garden in the background comes the General pushing Kon in front of him and laughing loudly.*)

NIKOLAI: Sh-h-h!

CLEOPATRA: Well, you murderers?

CURTAIN

## ACT II

*A bright moon throws heavy shadows in the garden. On the table is a disorderly array of bread, cucumbers, eggs, and bottles of beer. Candles are burning in lanterns. Agrafena is washing the dishes. Yagodin is sitting with a stick in his hand and smoking. Tatyana, Nadya and Levshin are standing left. Everyone speaks in lowered voices, as though listening for something. The general atmosphere is one of tense anticipation.*

LEVSHIN (*to Nadya*): Everything human carries the taint of copper, miss. That's why your young heart is heavy. All people are chained to a copper kopek—all but you, and so you don't fit in. To every man on this earth the kopek jingles its message: "Love me as you love yourself." But that doesn't mean you. A bird neither sows nor reaps.

YAGODIN (*to Agrafena*): Levshin has started teaching his betters, the old simpleton!

AGRAFENA: Why not? He tells them the truth. A little truth won't do his betters any harm either.

NADYA: Do you have a hard life, Levshin?

LEVSHIN: Oh, not very. I have no children. I have a woman—a wife, that is. But our children all died.

NADYA: Aunt Tanya, why does everyone speak in whispers when there's a dead body in the house?

TATYANA: I don't know.

LEVSHIN (*smiling*): Because we're all guilty before the dead, miss. Guilty on every count.

NADYA: But it isn't always like this, that the dead man's been—been killed. But people speak in whispers anyway.

LEVSHIN: We kill them all, miss. Some with bullets, others with words. We kill everybody with our doings. We drive people from the sun into the soil without even knowing it. But we begin to sense our guilt, once we've thrown a man into the arms of death. We begin to feel sorry for the dead one and to feel ashamed of ourselves, and a great fear rises up in us. Because, don't you see, we ourselves are being driven the same way; we ourselves are headed for the grave.

NADYA: That's a dreadful thought.

LEVSHIN: Don't let it worry you. Today it's dreadful, tomorrow it's forgotten. And people begin pushing each other about again. When one of them falls down everybody is quiet and ashamed for a moment. Then they give a sigh and begin all over again, in the same old way. It's all their ignorance. But *you* need feel no shame, miss. Dead people won't disturb you. You can talk as loud as you like in front of them.

TATYANA: How do you think we ought to change our way of living, Levshin?

LEVSHIN (*mysteriously*): We've got to do away with the kopek. Got to bury it. Once the kopek's gone, why should we push each other about? Why be enemies?

TATYANA: And that's all?

LEVSHIN: It's enough to begin with.

TATYANA: Wouldn't you like to take a walk in the garden, Nadya?

NADYA (*pensively*): Perhaps.

(*They disappear in the depths of the garden; Levshin crosses to the table. The General, Kon and Pology appear near the tent.*)

YAGODIN: You're sowing your seeds on stony soil, Levshin, you simpleton!

LEVSHIN: Why?

YAGODIN: No sense in trying to teach them anything. As though they could understand! What you say would reach the heart of a working man, but not of the gentlefolk.

LEVSHIN: The young miss is a nice little thing. Grekov told me about her.

AGRAFENA: Will you have another glass of tea?

LEVSHIN: I don't mind if I do.

(*Pause. Then the General's voice is heard; the white dresses of Nadya and Tatyana glimpse through the trees.*)

GENERAL: Or you take a piece of string and stretch it across the road so's nobody can see it. Somebody comes along and all of a sudden—flop!

POLOGY: It's such a pleasure to see somebody fall, sir!

YAGODIN: Hear that?

LEVSHIN: I hear it all right.

KON: We can't do a thing like that today, with a dead man in the house. You can't play jokes with a dead man in the house.

GENERAL: Don't teach me! When you die I'll do a hand-spring.

(*Tatyana and Nadya approach the table.*)

LEVSHIN: The General's in his dotage.

AGRAFENA (*going towards the house*): Always up to some tricks!

TATYANA (*sitting down at the table*): Tell me, Levshin, are you a Socialist?

LEVSHIN (*simply*): Me? No. Me and Timofei—we're weavers. That's what we are—weavers.

TATYANA: Do you know any Socialists? Have you heard about them?

LEVSHIN: Yes, we've heard about them. We don't know any, but we've heard about them.

TATYANA: Do you know Sintsov who works in the office?

LEVSHIN: Oh yes, we know him. We know all the men in the office.

TATYANA: Have you ever spoken to him?

YAGODIN (*uneasily*): What should we speak to him about? He works upstairs. We're downstairs. If we have to go to the office, he tells us what the director wants and that's all. That's all we know about him.

NADYA: You seem to be afraid of us, Levshin. Don't be afraid. We're really very much interested—

LEVSHIN: Why should we be afraid? We haven't done anything wrong. They asked us to come here and keep order, so we came. Down there the people are mad. They swear they'll burn down the factory and everything else—won't leave anything but a heap of cinders. Well, we don't approve of such mischief. There's no point in burning things down. Why burn them down? We built them ourselves, we and our fathers, and our grandfathers. Why should we go and burn them down?

TATYANA: I hope you don't think we're questioning you so as to do you harm.

YAGODIN: Why should you? *We* don't wish anybody any harm.

LEVSHIN: Here's what we think: whatever people have built with their own hands is sacred. You have to value human labour, and not go burning things down. The people are dark-minded. They love a fire. And they've been sore tempted. The deceased was hard on us, there's no denying that. He kept waving that pistol of his to put the fear of God in us—

NADYA: Is my uncle any better?

YAGODIN: Zakhar Ivanovich?

NADYA: Yes. Is he any kinder? Or is he just as hard on you?

LEVSHIN: I wouldn't say that.

YAGODIN (*sullenly*): They're all the same, seems to me—strict or easy. All alike.

LEVSHIN (*gently*): The strict one's a boss and the easy one's a boss. A cancer don't care whose flesh it eats.

YAGODIN (*with a bored air*): Zakhar Ivanovich is kind-hearted.

NADYA: You mean he's better than Skrobotov?

YAGODIN (*softly*): Don't forget the director's dead.

LEVSHIN: Your uncle's a good man, miss. Only—that don't make it any easier for us.

TATYANA (*irritated*): Let's go, Nadya. Can't you see they don't want to understand us?

NADYA (*softly*): Yes.

(*They go off in silence. Levshin watches them go, then looks at Yagodin; they both smile.*)

YAGODIN: Get on your nerves, don't they?

LEVSHIN: Hear that? They're "very much interested."

YAGODIN: Maybe they think we'll spill something.

LEVSHIN: I still think the young miss is a nice little thing. Too bad she's rich.

YAGODIN: We'd better tell Matvei Nikolayevich about this—that the lady was trying to pump us.

LEVSHIN: We'll tell him. And we'll tell Grekov.

YAGODIN: I wonder how things are going. The management ought to give in to us.

LEVSHIN: It will. Then in a little while they'll start squeezing us against the wall again.

YAGODIN: Squeezing our guts out.

LEVSHIN: Uh-huh.

YAGODIN: Hm. Oh, to have a good sleep!

LEVSHIN: Not yet. Here comes the General.

*(The General comes on. Pology walks beside him deferentially. Behind them comes Kon. Suddenly Pology seizes the General's arm.)*

GENERAL: What's that?

POLOGY: A hole in the ground. Don't step in it.

GENERAL: Oh. What's all this on the table? Such a mess. Have you been eating here?

YAGODIN: Yes, sir; us and the young miss.

GENERAL: So you're guarding the place for us?

YAGODIN: Yes, sir. We're on duty.

GENERAL: Good. I'll speak to the Governor about you. How many of you are there here?

LEVSHIN: Two of us.

GENERAL: Idiot! I can count to two. How many are there all together?

YAGODIN: About thirty.

GENERAL: Are you armed?

LEVSHIN (*to Yagodin*): Where's that pistol you had, Timofei?

YAGODIN: Here it is.

GENERAL: Don't hold it by the muzzle! Damn it, Kon, teach these blockheads how to hold a revolver. (*To Levshin.*) Have you got a revolver?

LEVSHIN: Not me.

GENERAL: If the rebels come, do you intend to shoot?

LEVSHIN: They won't come, sir. They didn't mean anything—just flared up for a minute.

GENERAL: But if they *do* come?

LEVSHIN: They were sore, you see—about closing down the factory. Some of them have children.

GENERAL: What are you raving on about? I'm asking you if you intend to shoot?

LEVSHIN: Well, we're willing to, sir. Why not? Only we don't know how. And besides, there's nothing for us to shoot with. If this was a rifle, now—or a cannon.

GENERAL: Kon! Come here and teach them. Go down to the river.

KON (*sullenly*): Allow me to report that it's dark, sir. People will get frightened if we start shooting. They'll rush out to see what's up. But just as you say. It's all the same to me.

GENERAL: Very well. Put it off until tomorrow!

LEVSHIN: Tomorrow everything will be quiet. They'll open up the factory tomorrow.

GENERAL: Who will?

LEVSHIN: Zakhar Ivanovich. He's talking to the workers about that now.

GENERAL: Damn it all! If I had my way, I'd close down the factory forever. I'd put a stop to those pesky whistles early in the morning!

YAGODIN: We wouldn't mind either if they blew them a little later.

GENERAL: And I'd starve you good and proper. No more of your riots!

LEVSHIN: Do you call this a riot?

GENERAL: Hold your tongue! What are you doing here anyway? You ought to be making your rounds along the fence, and if anybody comes crawling up—shoot on the spot! I'll be responsible!

LEVSHIN: Come on, Timofei. Bring your pistol.

GENERAL (*muttering after them*): Pistol! The stupid asses! Don't even know a revolver when they see one!

POLOGY: Allow me to inform you, sir, that the common people are, for the most part, coarse and bestial. Take my case, for instance: I have a garden and cultivate vegetables with my own hands—

GENERAL: Very commendable.

POLOGY: I devote all the free time at my disposal to this work.

GENERAL: Well, everybody's expected to work!

(*Tatyana and Nadya come on.*)

TATYANA (*from a distance*): Why are you shouting so?

GENERAL: Ugh, these people! (*To Pology.*) Well?

POLOGY: But almost every night the workers steal the fruits of my labour.

GENERAL: Steal, you say?

POLOGY: Exactly. I have sought the protection of the law, but the law is represented in these parts by the honourable Chief of Police, an individual who displays the greatest indifference to the needs of the population.

TATYANA (*to Pology*): Why in the world do you use such high-flown language?

POLOGY (*embarrassed*): Do I? I beg your pardon, but for three years I studied at the gymnasium and I read the paper daily.

TATYANA (*smiling*): Oh, so that explains it!

NADYA: You're very funny, Pology.

POLOGY: I am happy if it gives you pleasure. An individual should strive to make himself pleasant.

GENERAL: I suppose you love fishing?

POLOGY: I've never tried it, sir.

GENERAL (*shrugging his shoulders*): A strange answer!

TATYANA: What haven't you tried—fishing or loving?

POLOGY: The former.

TATYANA: And the latter?

POLOGY: I *have* tried that.

TATYANA: Are you married?

POLOGY: I only dream of married bliss. But since I earn only twenty-five rubles a month (*Nikolai and Cleopatra enter quickly*), I dare not venture upon such an undertaking.

NIKOLAI (*angrily*): Simply amazing! Utter chaos!

CLEOPATRA: How could he! How *dare* he!

GENERAL: What's the trouble?

CLEOPATRA (*shouting*): Your nephew is a milksop! He has granted all the demands of the insurgents—the murderers of my husband!

NADYA (*softly*): But all of them aren't murderers.

CLEOPATRA: He is making a mockery of his dead body! And of me! Just to think of it! Opening the gates of the factory before the man is buried whom those rascals killed just because he closed them!

NADYA: But uncle is afraid they will burn down everything!

CLEOPATRA: You're a child and should hold your tongue!

NIKOLAI: The speech that young boy made! The most obvious socialist propaganda!

CLEOPATRA: There is some clerk who is at the head of them and gives them advice. He had the nerve to say the crime was provoked by the deceased himself!

NIKOLAI (*jotting down something in his notebook*): That fellow rouses my suspicions. He's too clever for a mere clerk.

TATYANA: Are you speaking of Sintsov?

NIKOLAI: Yes.

CLEOPATRA: I feel as if someone had spit in my face.

POLOGY (*to Nikolai*): Allow me to remark that, when reading the newspaper, Mr. Sintsov always comments extensively on politics and is strongly prejudiced against the authorities.

TATYANA (*to Nikolai*): Are you interested in hearing such tales?

NIKOLAI (*challengingly*): Yes, I am! Are you trying to shame me?

TATYANA: I don't think Mr. Pology belongs here.

POLOGY (*confused*): I beg your pardon. I shall go at once. (*Hurries out.*)

CLEOPATRA: Here he comes. I don't want to see him I couldn't bear it! (*Hurries off.*)

NADYA: What is happening?

GENERAL: I'm too old for such excitement. Killings. Uprisings. Zakhar should have foreseen all this when he invited me to come here for a rest. (*Zakhar comes on, excited but pleased. On seeing Nikolai he stops in embarrassment and adjusts his glasses.*) Listen, my dear nephew, do you realize what you've done?

ZAKHAR: Just a minute, uncle. Nikolai Vasilyevich!

NIKOLAI: Ye-es.

ZAKHAR: The workers were in such a state of excitement that ... I was afraid they would destroy the factory ... and so I ... I conceded their demand not to close down. And their demand about Dichkov, too. But I did it on condition that they hand over the criminal, and they are looking for him.

NIKOLAI (*dryly*): They needn't trouble themselves. We'll find the murderer without their aid.

ZAKHAR: I would rather have them find him themselves. That would be better. We agreed to open the factory after lunch tomorrow.

NIKOLAI: Who do you mean by 'we'?

ZAKHAR: I....

NIKOLAI: Ah! Thank you for the information. But I feel that after the death of my brother his place should be taken by me and his wife. Certainly you should have consulted us in this matter instead of making the decision yourself.

ZAKHAR: But I asked you to come! Sintsov even came for you, but you refused.

NIKOLAI: I could hardly be expected to think of business matters on the day of my brother's death.

ZAKHAR: But you went to the factory anyway.

NIKOLAI: I did. I went to listen to their speeches. What of it?

ZAKHAR: But don't you see? The deceased, it turns out, wired the town authorities to send troops. A reply was received saying they would arrive tomorrow morning.

GENERAL: Aha! Soldiers! That's talking! No nonsense when there's soldiers on the scene!

NIKOLAI: A very wise measure.

ZAKHAR: I'm not sure. If troops come the workers will grow more excited than ever. The Lord only knows what they may do if we don't open up the factory! It seems to me that I did the right thing. At least there will be no bloodshed.

NIKOLAI: I take a different view of the matter. You should not have conceded everything to those ... er ... creatures, if only out of respect for the memory of the deceased.

ZAKHAR: But don't you see this may lead to further tragedy?

NIKOLAI: That doesn't concern me.

ZAKHAR: True, but what about me? It's me who has to live with the workers. And if their blood is shed ... why, they might tear down the factory!

NIKOLAI: I don't believe they would.

GENERAL: Neither do I!

ZAKHAR (*despondent*): And so you blame me for what I've done?

NIKOLAI: Yes, I do.

ZAKHAR (*sincerely*): Why should there be all this hostility? I want only one thing—to avoid the horror that is only too possible. I don't want bloodshed. Is it really impossible to achieve a peaceful, reasonable way of life?

You look upon me with hate, the workers with distrust. I want to do what's right—only what's right!

GENERAL: Who knows what's right? It isn't even a word. Just a collection of letters. R for rat, T for tat. But business is business. Isn't that how it goes?

NADYA (*tearfully*): Hush, grandfather. Uncle, don't let it upset you so. He doesn't understand. Oh, why don't you understand, Nikolai Vasilyevich? You're so clever. Why don't you trust uncle?

NIKOLAI: Sorry, but I am going, Zakhar Ivanovich. I'm not accustomed to having children interfere in business matters. (*Goes off.*)

ZAKHAR: See that, Nadya?

NADYA (*taking his hand*): It doesn't matter. The important thing is that the workers must be satisfied. There are so many of them, lots more than us.

ZAKHAR: Just a minute. I'm very much displeased with you, Nadya. Very.

GENERAL: So am I.

ZAKHAR: You sympathize with the workers. That's only natural at your age, but you mustn't lose your sense of proportion, my dear. This morning, now, you brought that fellow Grekov to the table. I know him. He's an intelligent chap. But you had no right to cause a scene with your aunt on his account.

GENERAL: Go on! Give it to her!

NADYA: But you don't know how it all happened.

ZAKHAR: I know more than you do, you can be sure. Our people are coarse and uncultivated. If you give them a finger they seize the whole hand.

TATYANA (*quietly*): Like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

ZAKHAR: They are as greedy as animals, and they mustn't be spoiled. They must be cultivated—that's it, cultivated. Be so good as to think this over.

GENERAL: And now I'll have my say. The devil only

knows how you behave toward me, you little vixen. Let me remind you that it will take you forty years to catch up to me in age. You'll have to wait that long before I'll let you talk to me as an equal. Remember that. Kon!

KON (*from among the trees*): Here.

GENERAL: Where is that . . . what's his name? . . . that corkscrew.

KON: What corkscrew?

GENERAL: That . . . I've forgotten his name. The thin slippery one.

KON: Oh, Pology. I don't know.

GENERAL (*going toward the tent*): Find him.

(*Zakhar walks up and down with bent head, polishing his glasses on his pocket handkerchief. Nadya sits deep in thought. Tatyana is standing and watching them.*)

TATYANA: Is it known who killed him?

ZAKHAR: They say they don't know, but they promise to find him. Of course, they know. I think—(*He glances about and lowers his voice.*)—I think they have a tacit agreement. It's a conspiracy. It's true that he exasperated them.—He stopped at nothing. Love of power was a kind of disease with him. And so they just killed him. Awful, isn't it? Awful in its very simplicity. And still they look at you with such clear, candid eyes, as though they don't realize they have committed a crime. It's all so shockingly simple!

TATYANA: They say Skrobotov was about to shoot when somebody snatched the revolver out of his hand and—

ZAKHAR: That isn't important. It was they who did the shooting, not he.

NADYA: Why don't you sit down?

ZAKHAR: Why did he send for troops? They found out as they find everything out, and that hastened his death. Of course I had to throw open the gates of the factory. If

I hadn't, my relations with them would have been spoiled for a long time to come. At a time like this one has to show them more attention and consideration. Who knows how it may end? At such a time a sensible person must make sure to have friends among the common people. (*Levshin appears upstage.*) Who's that?

LEVSHIN: It's us. We're on duty.

ZAKHAR: Well, Levshin, now that you've killed a man you've become meek and peaceable, eh?

LEVSHIN: We're always that way, Zakhar Ivanovich; we're always peaceable.

ZAKHAR (*reprovingly*): Aren't you just! And you kill people peaceably, eh? By the way, I hear you're spreading ideas, Levshin; some new-fangled ideas about not needing money and bosses and such things any more. That's forgivable—that is, it's understandable—in Lev Tolstoi, but you'd better drop it, my friend. Nothing good will come of such talk.

(*Tatyana and Nadya go out right, from whence the voices of Sintsov and Yakov come. Yagodin appears from behind the trees.*)

LEVSHIN (*calmly*): What talk? I've lived a bit, thought a bit, and say what I think.

ZAKHAR: Bosses aren't beasts. You've got to understand that. I'm not really a bad sort. I'm always ready to help you. I want to do what is right.

LEVSHIN (*sighing*): Is there anybody who wants to do himself harm?

ZAKHAR: But can't you understand? I want to do what is right for *you*!

LEVSHIN: We understand, of course....

ZAKHAR (*looking closely at him*): No, you're wrong. You don't understand. What strange people you are!

Sometimes you're like beasts, sometimes like little children.

(*He goes out. Levshin stands leaning on his stick watching him go.*)

YAGODIN: Another sermon?

LEVSHIN: He's a Chinaman. A real Chinaman. What's he trying to say? He can't understand anybody but himself.

YAGODIN: He says he wants to do what's right.

LEVSHIN: That's it.

YAGODIN: Let's go. Here they come.

(*Levshin and Yagodin withdraw into the depth of the garden. Tatyana, Nadya, Yakov and Sintsov come on upstage right.*)

NADYA: We keep walking round and round in circles, as if in a dream.

TATYANA: Would you like something to eat, Matvei Nikolayevich?

SINTSOV: I'd rather have a glass of tea. I've talked so much today that I have a sore throat.

NADYA: Aren't you afraid of anything?

SINTSOV (*sitting down at the table*): Me? No, I'm not.

NADYA: Well, I am. Things have got so mixed up! I can't make out who is right and who is wrong.

SINTSOV (*smiling*): They'll get straightened out. Don't be afraid to think. Think fearlessly, straight through to the end. On the whole, there's nothing to be afraid of.

TATYANA: Do you think everything has quieted down?

SINTSOV: Yes. The workers hardly ever win, and even a small victory brings them great satisfaction.

NADYA: Are you fond of them?

SINTSOV: That's hardly the word. I've lived with them a long time; I know them and am aware of their strength. I believe in their intelligence.

TATYANA: And that the future belongs to them?

SINTSOV: Yes, I believe that, too.

NADYA: The future. What's the future?

TATYANA (*smiling*): They're a sly lot, your proletarians. Nadya and I tried to talk to them, but nothing came of it.

NADYA: It wasn't very nice. The old man talked to us as though we were wicked—spies or something. But there's another one, Grekov—he looks at people differently. The old man keeps smiling as if he pitied us, as if we were sick.

TATYANA: Stop drinking, Yakov. I can't bear to see you.

YAKOV: What am I supposed to do?

SINTSOV: Is there nothing else to do?

YAKOV: I have an aversion, an unconquerable aversion to business and everything connected with it. You see, I belong to the third category.

SINTSOV: To what?

YAKOV: The third category. People are divided into three categories: the first consists of those who work all their lives, the second of those who save money, the third of those who refuse to earn their bread because there's no sense in it, and can't save money because it's foolish and beneath them. That's me—the third category. To this category belong all the lazy loafers, the tramps, monks, beggars and other parasites of this world.

NADYA: Why do you say such tiresome things, uncle? And you're not like that at all. You're just kind and soft-hearted.

YAKOV: In other words, good-for-nothing. I realized that when I was still in school. People get into these three categories before they grow up.

TATYANA: Nadya was right when she said you were tiresome, Yakov.

YAKOV: I agree with her. Matvei Nikolayevich, do you think life has a face?

SINTSOV: It may have.

YAKOV: It does have. And its face is always young. Not long ago life looked at me indifferently, but now it looks at me sternly and keeps saying: "Who are you? Where are you going?"

*(He seems to be frightened by something, and when he tries to smile his lips quiver and his face is distorted into a pitiful grimace.)*

TATYANA: Oh, drop it, Yakov. Here comes the prosecutor. I shouldn't like you to say such things in front of him.

YAKOV: Very well.

NADYA (*softly*): Everybody's expecting something awful to happen. Why don't they let me make friends with the workers? It's so stupid!

NIKOLAI (*coming up*): May I have a glass of tea?

TATYANA: You may.

*(For a few seconds everyone sits in silence. Nikolai is standing, stirring his tea.)*

NADYA: I should like to know why the workers don't trust uncle, and in general—

NIKOLAI (*sullenly*): They only trust those who make speeches on the theme: "Workers of All Countries, Unite!" They trust them, all right.

NADYA (*quietly and with a shrug of her shoulders*): Those words—that challenge to the workers of all countries—they make me feel out of it, as if people like us were not wanted.

NIKOLAI (*roused*): Quite right! Every civilized person should feel like that, and then I'm sure another challenge would soon be heard: "Civilized People of All Countries, Unite!" It's high time to cry that. High time! The barbarians are coming to trample in the dust the fruits of

thousands of years of civilization. They're on the way, impelled by their greed!

YAKOV: They wear their souls in their bellies, in their empty bellies, and that's a sight to make anyone drink.

(*Pours himself out a glass of beer.*)

NIKOLAI: The mob is coming, impelled by greed, marshalled into unity by their one desire—to guzzle!

TATYANA (*pensively*): The mob. Everywhere the mob. In the theatres, in the churches....

NIKOLAI: What can these people contribute? Nothing but destruction. And note that the destruction will be more fearful here, among us, than anywhere else.

TATYANA: It always seems strange to me when I hear the workers referred to as advanced people. That's far from my understanding of them.

NIKOLAI: And you, Mr. Sintsov? I don't suppose you agree with us.

SINTSOV (*calmly*): No, I don't.

NADYA: Aunt Tanya, do you remember what the old man said about the kopek? How simply he put it!

NIKOLAI: Why don't you agree with us, Mr. Sintsov?

SINTSOV: Because I think differently.

NIKOLAI: A reasonable answer. But perhaps you would share your views with us?

SINTSOV: I don't think I care to.

NIKOLAI: Very sorry to hear it. I hope when we next meet, your attitude will have changed. Yakov Ivanovich, if it isn't asking too much, see me to the house. My nerves are shot to pieces.

YAKOV (*rising with difficulty*): With pleasure, with pleasure. (*They go out.*)

TATYANA: That prosecutor is a loathsome man. It's hard to agree with anything he says.

NADYA (*rising*): Then why do you?

SINTSOV (*laughing*): Yes, why do you, Tatyana Pavlovna?

TATYANA: Because our views are the same.

SINTSOV (*to Tatyana*): You think as he does, but you feel differently. You want to understand, but he doesn't. Understanding means nothing to him.

TATYANA: He must be very cruel.

SINTSOV: Yes, he is. In the city he handles the political cases, and his attitude towards those who are arrested is disgusting.

TATYANA: By the way, he jotted down something about you in his notebook.

SINTSOV (*with a smile*): I don't doubt it. He had a talk with Pology. He never misses anything. Tatyana Pavlovna, I should like to ask a favour of you.

TATYANA: I shall be glad to do anything I can.

SINTSOV: Thank you. I suppose the gendarmes have been called.

TATYANA: They have.

SINTSOV: That means they will search the houses. Could you hide something for me?

TATYANA: Do you think they will search your house?

SINTSOV: Of course.

TATYANA: And they may arrest you?

SINTSOV: I don't think so. What for? Because I make speeches? Zakhar Ivanovich knows that in all my speeches I call the workers to order.

TATYANA: And is there nothing in your past?

SINTSOV: I have no past. Will you help me? I wouldn't trouble you if I didn't think the houses of all those who might hide these things were sure to be searched tomorrow. (*Laughs quietly.*)

TATYANA (*embarrassed*): I shall speak frankly. My situation in this house does not allow me to use the room I have been given as though it were my own.

SINTSOV: In other words you cannot? Well, then—

TATYANA: Please don't be offended.

SINTSOV: Oh, I'm not. Your refusal is quite understandable.

TATYANA: But wait. I shall speak to Nadya.

*(Goes out. Sintsov drums with his fingers on the table as he watches her go. Cautious steps are heard.)*

SINTSOV (*softly*): Who's there?

GREKOV: Me. Are you alone?

SINTSOV: Yes, but there are people about. What's new at the factory?

GREKOV (*with a short laugh*): As you know, they agreed to find the one who did the shooting. An investigation is being carried on. Some are shouting that the Socialists killed him—those who are trying to save their own skins.

SINTSOV: Do you know . . . who did it?

GREKOV: Akimov.

SINTSOV: Really?! Hm. I didn't expect that. He's a decent, sensible fellow.

GREKOV: Hot-tempered. Wants to give himself up. He has a wife and child, and another coming. I just spoke to Levshin. He, of course, talks nonsense—says we ought to substitute somebody less important for Akimov.

SINTSOV: Queer duck! But I'm sorry to hear this. (*Pause.*) You'll have to bury everything in the ground, Grekov. There's no other place to hide it.

GREKOV: I've found a place. The telegraph operator agreed to take everything. But you'd better get away from here, Matvei Nikolayevich.

SINTSOV: I'm not going anywhere.

GREKOV: They'll arrest you.

SINTSOV: Let them. The workers will get the wrong impression if I leave.

GREKOV: True enough, but I feel sorry for you.

SINTSOV: Nonsense. Akimov's the one to feel sorry for.

GREKOV: And there's nothing we can do to help. Wants to give himself up. Funny to see you in the role of guardian of the bosses' property.

SINTSOV (*smiling*): Can't be helped. I suppose my fellows are asleep?

GREKOV: No, they're talking things over. The night's fine.

SINTSOV: I'd be glad to go along with you, but I must wait here. They'll probably arrest you too.

GREKOV: So we'll serve our sentence together. I'm off.

(*Goes out.*)

SINTSOV: Good-bye. (*Tatyana comes on.*) Don't bother, Tatyana Pavlovna; I've arranged everything. Good-bye.

TATYANA: I'm awfully sorry.

SINTSOV: Good night.

(*Goes out. Tatyana walks quietly up and down, studying the toes of her shoes. Yakov comes on.*)

YAKOV: Why don't you go to bed?

TATYANA: I don't feel like it. I'm thinking of going away from here.

YAKOV: Hm. As for me, there's nowhere for me to go. I've sailed past all the continents and islands.

TATYANA: It's depressing here. Everything keeps swaying and makes me dizzy. I'm forced to lie, and I can't bear to lie.

YAKOV: True, you can't bear to lie. Unfortunately for me. Unfortunately.

TATYANA (*to herself*): And I just told a lie. Of course Nadya would have agreed to hide those things. But I have no right to start her along that road.

YAKOV: What are you talking about?

TATYANA: Nothing in particular. How strange! Yesterday everything seemed so clear and simple. I thought I knew what I wanted.

YAKOV (*quietly*): Talented drunkards, handsome loafers and other members of the jolly professions have ceased to attract attention. As long as we offered a contrast to the boredom of everyday life, people took an interest in us. But now everyday life is becoming more and more dramatic. And people are shouting at us: "Hey, you clowns and comedians! Off the stage!" But the stage is your field, Tanya.

TATYANA (*moved*): My field? Yes, I once thought I stood firmly on the stage, and that I could attain to great heights there. (*Forcefully, and painfully.*) I feel hurt and ashamed when people watch me coldly, silently, as if they were saying: "We know all that. It's old and stale." They disarm me. I can't capture their hearts and rouse their emotions. I want to tremble with joy and fear, I want to speak words full of fire, passion, and hate! Words sharp as a knife, flaming as a torch! I want to pour them lavishly before people—let them catch fire! Let them shout and rush away! But there are no such words. I would stop them by tossing other words to them—beautiful ones this time, beautiful as flowers, full of hope and love and joy! They would weep, and so would I. Weep such lovely tears. They would give me an ovation, bury me in flowers, lift me into the air! For a moment I should have held them in my power. For a moment I should have been vitally alive. All of life in that one moment! But there are no such living words.

YAKOV: We all know how to live only for a moment.

TATYANA: The best things in life are always for just a moment. How I should like to see people different—more responsive! And life different—less vain. A life in which art would be indispensable to everyone, always. So that I would have a place in life. (*Yakov is gazing wide-*

*eyed into the darkness.*) Why do you drink so much? You have killed yourself. Once you were handsome.

YAKOV: Forget it.

TATYANA: Can't you understand how hard it is for me?

YAKOV (*with horror*): No matter how drunk I am, I understand everything. That's my misfortune. My mind keeps going on and on with accursed persistence. All the time. And all the time I see a leering face, broad and unwashed, with enormous eyes that keep saying: "Well?" Just that one word: "Well?"

PAULINA (*running in*): Tanya! Come here, Tanya. It's Cleopatra—she's gone mad—she's insulting everybody. Perhaps you can bring her to her senses.

TATYANA (*miserably*): Leave me out of your squabbles. Gobble each other up if you must, but don't keep getting in other people's way.

PAULINA (*startled*): Tanya! What's the matter with you? What are you saying?

TATYANA: What are you after? What do you want?

PAULINA: Look at her. Here she comes.

ZAKHAR (*off stage*): Be quiet, I beg of you!

CLEOPATRA (*also off stage*): It's you who should be quiet in my presence!

PAULINA: She'll start shouting here, with these muzhiks around. It's awful, Tanya. Please—

ZAKHAR (*entering*): I'm afraid I'm losing my mind.

CLEOPATRA (*following him*): You can't run away from me. I'll make you listen to me. You played up to the workers because you needed their respect. You threw them a human life as you would toss a piece of meat to snarling dogs. You're humane at other people's expense, at the price of other people's blood!

ZAKHAR: What is she saying?

YAKOV (*to Tatyana*): You'd better go away. (*He goes out.*)

PAULINA: Look here, my fine lady, we're respectable people and we won't have a woman of your reputation shouting at us.

ZAKHAR (*startled*): Paulina! For God's sake!

CLEOPATRA: What makes you think you're respectable? Because you babble about politics? About the misery of the masses? About progress and humanity? Is that why?

TATYANA: Cleopatra Petrovna! Enough of this!

CLEOPATRA: I'm not talking to you. You don't belong here. This is none of your business. My husband was an honest man—frank and honest. He knew the common people better than you. He didn't go around babbling like you. And you betrayed him. You murdered him with your vicious stupidity.

TATYANA (*to Paulina and Zakhar*): Go away, you two.

CLEOPATRA: I'll go away myself. You're loathsome—all of you! (*Goes out.*)

ZAKHAR: There's a crazy woman for you!

PAULINA (*tearfully*): We must drop everything and go away. To insult people like that!

ZAKHAR: What has got into her? If she had loved her husband, or even lived contentedly with him! But to have taken on at least two lovers a year and then to go about shouting like this!

PAULINA: We must sell the factory.

ZAKHAR (*in vexation*): Nonsense! That's not the way out. We have got to think things over, and think them over well. I was speaking to Nikolai Vasilyevich when that woman tore in and interrupted us.

PAULINA: Nikolai Vasilyevich hates us too. He's a horrid man.

ZAKHAR (*more composed*): He's angered and shocked, but he's a clever person and has no reason for hating us. There are very practical considerations binding him to us since the death of Mikhail.

PAULINA: I'm afraid of him, and I don't trust him. He'll deceive you.

ZAKHAR: Nonsense, Paulina. He has very good judgement—yes, he has. The fact of the matter is, I really did assume a dubious position in my relations with the workers. I must confess that. When I spoke to them that evening—you can't imagine how dead set they are against us, Paulina!

PAULINA: I told you so. That's just what I said. They'll always be our enemies! (*Tatyana laughs quietly and goes out. Paulina looks at her and purposely raises her voice as she continues.*) Everyone is our enemy! They all envy us, and that's why they're all against us.

ZAKHAR (*walking quickly up and down*): You're partly right, of course. Nikolai Vasilyevich says it isn't a struggle between the classes, it's a struggle between the races—black and white. That's putting it a bit crudely—going to extremes, so to speak. But when you stop to think that it is we, the cultivated people, who have created science and art and all sorts of things, then equality—physiological equality—hm ... er ... well, all right. But first let them become human, let them become civilized, and then we shall speak about equality.

PAULINA (*alert*): I've never heard you speak like this before.

ZAKHAR: My ideas are schematic as yet. I haven't thought things through. Know thyself! That's the main thing.

PAULINA (*taking him by the arm*): You're too soft-hearted, darling. That's what makes it so hard for you.

ZAKHAR: We know very little and that's why we are so often amazed. Take that Sintsov, for instance—he amazed me and made me like him. Such simplicity! Such logical thinking! It turns out he's a Socialist, and that's where he gets his logic and simplicity.

PAULINA: There's no doubt but that he attracts a great deal of attention. Such an unpleasant face! But you ought to rest. Don't you think we had better go?

ZAKHAR (*following her*): And then there's another worker—Grekov. An insolent fellow. Nikolai Vasilyevich and I were just talking about the speech he made. He's no more than a boy, but he speaks with such arrogance....

(*They go out. Silence. A song is heard off stage, then soft voices. Enter Yagodin, Levshin and Ryabtsov, a young chap who frequently tosses back his head. His face is round and good-natured. The three of them stop under the trees.*)

LEVSHIN (*quietly and secretively*): It's for the common cause, Pavel.

RYABTSOV: I know.

LEVSHIN: For the common cause, the human cause. There's a high price on every great soul these days. The people are pulling themselves up with their minds. They're listening and reading and thinking. And those of them who have come to understand are priceless.

YAGODIN: That's true, Pavel.

RYABTSOV: I know it. Why the talk? I'll do it.

LEVSHIN: But not just for the fun of it. You've got to understand why. You're young and this means penal servitude.

RYABTSOV: That's all right. I'll run away.

YAGODIN: Maybe it won't mean that. You're too young to be sentenced to penal servitude, Pavel.

LEVSHIN: Let's think he's not. The worse we make it, the better. If a fellow's willing to suffer the worst, that means he's made up his mind once and for all.

RYABTSOV: I've made up my mind.

YAGODIN: Don't hurry. Think it over.

RYABTSOV: What's there to think over? He's been killed, so somebody's got to pay for it.

LEVSHIN: Yes, he has. And if nobody comes forward and gives himself up, many will be called to account. They'll call our best people to account, Pavel; those who are more valuable to the cause than you are.

RYABTSOV: I'm not objecting, am I? I may be young, but I understand. We have to keep a strong grip on each other—like the links of a chain.

LEVSHIN (*sighing*): That's true.

YAGODIN (*smiling*): We'll join hands, encircle them, close in tight, and there you are!

RYABTSOV: I've made up my mind. I have no one dependent on me, so I'm the one to go. Only it's too bad to pay such a price for such rotten blood.

LEVSHIN: Not for the blood, but for the sake of your comrades.

RYABTSOV: Yes, but I mean he was a beast. Scum, that's what he was.

LEVSHIN: And that's why he got killed. Good people die a natural death. Nobody wants to get rid of them.

RYABTSOV: Well, is that all?

YAGODIN: That's all, Pavel. So you'll tell them tomorrow morning?

RYABTSOV: Why should I wait until tomorrow?

LEVSHIN: It would be better to. The night's as good a counsellor as a mother.

RYABTSOV: All right. May I go now?

LEVSHIN: God be with you!

YAGODIN: Go ahead, brother. Be firm.

(*Ryabtsov goes out unhurriedly. Yagodin regards the stick he is toying with. Levshin stares at the sky.*)

LEVSHIN (*quietly*): There's a lot of fine people growing up these days, Timofei.

YAGODIN: Good weather, good crops.

LEVSHIN: It looks as if we were going to pull ourselves out of this hole.

YAGODIN (*unhappily*): Too bad about the lad.

LEVSHIN (*quietly*): Isn't it. Off you go to prison—and on such a charge. The only consolation is—he did it for his comrades.

YAGODIN: Yes.

LEVSHIN: But hold your tongue. Tck! Tck! What ever made Akimov pull that trigger! What good is a killing? No good at all. Kill one dog and the boss buys another, and there's an end to the tale.

YAGODIN (*sadly*): How many of our men pay with their lives!

LEVSHIN: Come along, sentry! We've got to guard the bosses' property! (*They go off.*) Damn it all!

YAGODIN: What's the matter?

LEVSHIN: This accursed life! If only we could hurry and do something about it!

CURTAIN

## ACT III

*A large room in the Bardin house. In the back wall are four windows and a door opening on to a verandah. Through the glass windows can be seen soldiers, gendarmes, and a group of workers, among whom are Levshin and Grekov. The room seems not to be lived in: the little furniture it contains consists of worn, odd pieces; the wallpaper is peeling off. A large table has been placed to the right. When the curtain rises, Kon is angrily pushing chairs about the table and Agrafena is sweeping the floor. There are large double doors in both the left and right walls.*

AGRAFENA: Well, you needn't be angry with *me*!

KON: I'm not angry. They can all go to the devil for all I care. Thank goodness I'll be dying soon. My heart's running down.

AGRAFENA: Don't boast. We'll all be dying.

KON: I've had enough—I can't take any more. At sixty-five I've got no teeth for their low tricks, any more than for walnuts. Fancy rounding up all those people and drenching them out there in the rain!

(*Captain Boboyedov and Nikolai enter through the doors left.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*happily*): So this will serve as the court-room? Splendid! I suppose you are acting in a professional capacity?

NIKOLAI: I am. Kon, call the Corporal!

BOBOYEDOV: Now this is how we shall serve up this dish: in the centre that... er... what's his name?

NIKOLAI: Sintsov.

BOBOYEDOV: Sintsov. Very touching. And grouped around him, the united workers of all countries, eh? That will be a sight to warm the heart! The owner of this place is a charming man. Very. We had quite a different impression of him. I know his sister-in-law from the theatre in Voronezh. Wonderful actress. (*Kvach enters from the porch.*) Well, Kvach?

KVACH: Everyone's been searched, sir.

BOBOYEDOV: And what did you find?

KVACH: Nothing. Everything was hid. Allow me to report that the Police Inspector is in too much of a hurry to do the job thoroughly, sir.

BOBOYEDOV: I might have expected it. The police are always like that. Did you find anything in the houses?

KVACH: A few things behind the icons in Levshin's place, sir.

BOBOYEDOV: Bring everything to my room.

KVACH: Yes, sir. That young gendarme who has just come from the dragoons—

BOBOYEDOV: What about him?

KVACH: He isn't thorough either.

BOBOYEDOV: Well, you'll have to see to that yourself. Be off with you now. (*Kvach leaves.*) He's a sharp one, that Kvach. Not much to look at, and seems a bit stupid, but he's got a nose like a bloodhound.

NIKOLAI: I advise you to pay special attention to that clerk, Bogdan Denisovich.

BOBOYEDOV: Oh, yes. Yes indeed. We'll make him squirm, have no fear.

NIKOLAI: I'm not speaking of Sintsov, but of Pology. I think he can be of use to us.

BOBOYEDOV: That fellow we were talking to? Yes, of course. We'll draw him into it.

(*Nikolai goes to the table and carefully arranges the documents.*)

CLEOPATRA (*at the door right*): Will you have another glass of tea, Captain?

BOBOYEDOV: Yes, thank you, if it isn't too much trouble. Beautiful country here. A lovely place. It turns out that I am acquainted with Madame Lugovaya. Didn't she used to act in the Voronezh Theatre?

CLEOPATRA: I believe she did. Did you find anything when you made your searches?

BOBOYEDOV (*graciously*): Everything. We found everything. And we shall always find everything, have no fear of that. Even if there's nothing to find.

CLEOPATRA: My late husband did not take these proclamations seriously. He always said papers didn't make a revolution.

BOBOYEDOV: Hm. That, of course, is not entirely correct,

CLEOPATRA: He said leaflets were secret orders issued to fools by idiots.

BOBOYEDOV (*laughing*): Very clever—but just as incorrect.

CLEOPATRA: And now you see they have advanced from issuing proclamations to taking action.

BOBOYEDOV: You can rest assured they will be punished severely—most severely.

CLEOPATRA: That's a great comfort. As soon as you came I felt relieved.

BOBOYEDOV: It's our duty to keep up people's spirits.

CLEOPATRA: I can't tell you what a pleasure it is to see someone who is wholesomely contented with life. Such people are a rarity these days.

BOBOYEDOV: Oh, the gendarmes in our corps are all hand-picked!

CLEOPATRA: Let's go to the table.

BOBOYEDOV (*going*): With pleasure! In what theatre is Madame Lugovaya to act this season?

CLEOPATRA: Sorry, but I don't know.

(*Tatyana and Nadya come in from the verandah.*)

NADYA (*agitated*): Did you notice how that old man Levshin looked at us?

TATYANA: Yes.

NADYA: I don't know, but somehow it all seems so dreadful, so shameful! Nikolai Vasilyevich, why must you do it? Why were these people arrested?

NIKOLAI (*dryly*): There were more than sufficient grounds for their arrest. And I must request you not to use the verandah as long as those—

NADYA: Oh, we won't!

TATYANA (*looking at Nikolai*): Has Sintsov been arrested too?

NIKOLAI: Sintsov has been arrested too.

NADYA (*walking about the room*): Seventeen people! Their wives are standing at the gates crying, and the soldiers push them about and laugh at them. Tell the soldiers they should at least be polite.

NIKOLAI: That's none of my business. Lieutenant Strepetov is in charge of the soldiers.

NADYA: I'll go and tell him.

(*Goes out right. Tatyana smiles and crosses to the table.*)

TATYANA: Listen, you graveyard of laws, as the General calls you—

NIKOLAI: I don't find the General particularly witty. I shouldn't repeat his jokes.

TATYANA: Oh, no. I made a mistake. A coffin of laws—that's what he called you. Don't you like it?

NIKOLAI: I'm not in a mood for joking.

TATYANA: Would you have me believe you're so serious-minded?

NIKOLAI: Let me remind you that they killed my brother yesterday.

TATYANA: What's that to you?

NIKOLAI: I beg your pardon, but—

TATYANA (*with a sarcastic smile*): Don't pretend. You aren't sorry for your brother. You never are sorry for anybody. Not as I am, for instance. Death—that is, a sudden death—is always a shock. But I assure you that not for one moment have you felt genuinely, humanly sorry for your brother. It isn't in you.

NIKOLAI (*constrained*): This is interesting. What do you want of me?

TATYANA: Haven't you observed that you and I are kindred spirits? No? That's a pity. I'm an actress—a cold-blooded creature, possessed of one desire—to have a good role to play. You, too, are hard-hearted, and just as anxious to get a good role. Tell me the truth, do you really want to be a prosecutor?

NIKOLAI (*quietly*): I want you to stop this.

TATYANA (*laughing, after a brief pause*): I'm a bad diplomat. I came to you with the purpose of—that is, I intended to be pleasant and charming, but as soon as I saw you I began to be insulting. You always make me want to hurt you. Always. Whether you're sitting or standing, talking or silently passing judgement on people. I intended to ask you—

NIKOLAI (*with a short laugh*): I can guess what.

TATYANA: Perhaps. But I suppose I'm too late?

NIKOLAI: Any time would be too late. Mr. Sintsov is too deeply involved.

TATYANA: I think it gives you satisfaction to tell me that, doesn't it?

NIKOLAI: I don't conceal it.

TATYANA (*sighing*): That just shows how much we resemble each other. I, too, am very mean and petty. Tell me, is Sintsov completely in your power? I mean particularly in *yours*?

NIKOLAI: Yes, he is.

TATYANA: And if I should ask you to let him off?

NIKOLAI: Nothing would come of it.

TATYANA: Even if I asked you very earnestly?

NIKOLAI: It would make no difference. You amaze me.

TATYANA: Do I? Why?

NIKOLAI: You are a beautiful woman and you undoubtedly have an original mind. You are a personality. There are innumerable chances for you to secure an easy, luxurious life, and yet you interest yourself in this nobody. Eccentricity is a disease, and any cultivated person would feel indignant at your conduct. No one who admires women and prizes beauty could forgive you for it.

TATYANA (*looking at him curiously*): So that's the judgement you pass on me! Alas! And on Sintsov?

NIKOLAI: Tonight that gentleman goes to jail.

TATYANA: Is that final?

NIKOLAI: Yes.

TATYANA: With no concessions as a favour to a lady? I don't believe it! If I wanted it badly enough, you would release Sintsov.

NIKOLAI (*thickly*): Try wanting it badly. Very badly.

TATYANA: I can't. I don't know how to do such things. But tell me the truth—it shouldn't be so hard to tell the truth once in your life—would you release him?

NIKOLAI (*after a pause*): I don't know.

TATYANA: I do. (*A pause, a sigh.*) What rotters we both are!

NIKOLAI: There are things that are unforgivable even in a woman.

TATYANA (*carelessly*): Oh, what of it? We're alone. No one can hear us. I have a right to tell you and myself that we're both—

NIKOLAI: Please. I don't want to hear any more.

TATYANA (*calmly and persistently*): The fact remains that you place a lower price on your principles than on a woman's kiss.

NIKOLAI: I have already said I don't care to listen to you.

TATYANA (*calmly*): Then go away. I certainly don't wish to keep you.

(*He goes out quickly. Tatyana wraps herself in her shawl and stands in the middle of the room gazing out on the verandah. Nadya and the Lieutenant come in right.*)

LIEUTENANT: I give you my word that a soldier would never insult a woman. For him a woman is sacred.

NADYA: Well, you'll see.

LIEUTENANT: Impossible. Only in the army has a chivalrous attitude to women been preserved.

(*They cross over to the door left. Paulina, Zakhar and Yakov come in.*)

ZAKHAR: You see, Yakov—

PAULINA: But how could it be otherwise?

ZAKHAR: We are up against reality, inevitability.

TATYANA: What are you talking about?

YAKOV: They are singing a dirge over me.

PAULINA: So amazingly unfeeling! Everyone is blaming us, even Yakov Ivanovich, who is always so mild. As though it were our fault that the soldiers came! And nobody invited the gendarmes either. They always come of themselves.

ZAKHAR: Blaming me for those arrests!

YAKOV: I'm not blaming you.

ZAKHAR: Not in so many words, but I feel—

YAKOV (*to Tatyana*): I was sitting there when he came up and said, "Well, brother?" and I answered, "Rotten, brother." That's all.

ZAKHAR: But can't you understand that to preach socialism in the form it is presented here would be impossible anywhere else? It simply couldn't happen!

PAULINA: Everyone should be interested in politics, but what has socialism to do with politics? That's what Zakhar says, and he's right.

YAKOV (*sullenly*): What kind of Socialist is old man Levshin? He's simply gone daffy from overwork, from sheer exhaustion.

ZAKHAR: They're all daffy.

PAULINA: You must show some pity, gentlemen. We have gone through so much!

ZAKHAR: Do you think I don't mind having my house turned into a law court? It's all Nikolai Vasilyevich's doing, but you can't argue with him after such a tragedy.

CLEOPATRA (*entering quickly*): Have you heard? The murderer has been found. They're bringing him here.

YAKOV (*mumbling*): Oh, for goodness' sake—

TATYANA: Who is it?

CLEOPATRA: A young boy. And I'm glad. Perhaps that doesn't sound very humane, but I'm glad. And if he's just a boy, I'd have them give him a good thrashing every day until the trial. Where is Nikolai Vasilyevich? Have you seen him?

(*Goes to the door left, where she is met by the General.*)

GENERAL (*sullenly*): Here you are, standing around like a bunch of wet hens.

ZAKHAR: It's very unpleasant, uncle.

GENERAL: The gendarmes? Yes, that Captain's cheeky. I'd like to play a trick on him. Are they spending the night here?

PAULINA: I don't think so. Why should they?

GENERAL: Too bad! If they stayed, I'd see that he got a pail of cold water dumped over him when he crawled into bed. That's the way I had faint-hearted cadets treated in my corps. Nothing funnier than to see somebody all wet and naked hopping around and shouting.

CLEOPATRA (*standing in the doorway*): Why in the world should you say such a thing, General? The Captain is a very respectable person and extremely energetic. As soon as he arrived he began rounding up the offenders. That should be appreciated. (*Goes out.*)

GENERAL: Hm. For her, any man with big moustaches is respectable. But people should know their place. That's the thing. That's the secret of respectability. (*Goes to the door left.*) Kon!

PAULINA (*quietly*): You'd think she was in charge of everything! Just see how she behaves! So rude and uncivil!

ZAKHAR: If only they'd hurry and get it over with! How I long for peace and quiet!

NADYA (*running in*): Aunt Tanya, that Lieutenant is too stupid for words! I think he beats his soldiers. You should see him rushing about, shouting and making hideous faces! They certainly ought to allow those who have been arrested to see their wives, uncle. Five of those men are married. Go out and tell that gendarme—he's the one in charge—

ZAKHAR: But you see, Nadya—

NADYA: I see that you're not moving. Go on. Go out and tell him. They're crying. Go on, I tell you.

ZAKHAR (*leaving*): I'm afraid it won't do any good.

PAULINA: You're always upsetting everybody, Nadya.

NADYA: It's you who are always upsetting everybody.

PAULINA: Us? Think what you're—

NADYA (*overwrought*): Yes, us—all of us—you and me and uncle. We're the ones who keep upsetting people. We don't do anything, but it's because of us the soldiers and gendarmes have come and all this business has started. And those people have been arrested, and the women are crying—all because of us!

TATYANA: Come here, Nadya.

NADYA (*going up to her*): Here I am. What do you want?

TATYANA: Sit down and compose yourself. You don't understand anything and there's nothing you can do.

NADYA: See, there's nothing you can say. I don't want to compose myself. I don't want to.

PAULINA: Your poor mother was right when she said you were a difficult child.

NADYA: Yes, she was right. She earned the bread she ate, but you—what do you do? Whose bread do you eat?

PAULINA: There she goes again! I must ask you to change your tone, Nadya. How dare you raise your voice when speaking to your elders?

NADYA: You're not my elders. You're just old, that's all.

PAULINA: Tanya, this is all your influence, and you ought to tell her she's just a stupid little girl.

TATYANA: Do you hear? You're a stupid little girl. (*Pats her on the shoulder.*)

NADYA: Is there nothing else you can say? No, there isn't. Nothing. You can't even defend yourselves. Such people! What *can* you do? Nothing. Not even here in your own house. Simply nothing.

PAULINA (*severely*): Do you realize what you're saying?

NADYA: All these people have come here—gendarmes, soldiers, fools with big moustaches—and all they do is give orders, drink tea, bang their swords, clink their spurs, tramp about laughing—and seizing people, shouting at them, threatening them, making the women cry.

And you? What good are you here? They've pushed you into the corner—

PAULINA: But you're talking nonsense. These people have come to protect us.

NADYA (*bitterly*): Oh, Aunt Paulina! Soldiers can't protect anybody from stupidity! Really they can't!

PAULINA (*indignant*): Wha-at?

NADYA (*holding out her arms*): Don't be angry. I mean everybody. (*Paulina goes out quickly.*) Oh dear, she's run away. She'll tell uncle that I'm rude and unmanageable and uncle will read me such a long lecture that even the flies will drop dead of boredom.

TATYANA (*thoughtfully*): How you are ever going to live in this world I can't imagine!

NADYA (*with a sweeping gesture*): Not like this! I wouldn't live like this for anything! I don't know what I am going to do—but I won't do anything the way you do it. I just walked past the verandah with that officer, and there was Grekov standing there smoking and watching us, and his eyes were laughing. And yet he knows they are sending him to jail. See that? Those who live the way they want to aren't afraid of anything. They're always cheerful. I'm ashamed to look at Levshin and Grekov. I don't know the others, but those two—I'll never forget them. Oh, here comes that idiot with the moustache. Gr-r-r-r!

BOBOYEDOV (*entering*): How terrifying! Who is it you're trying to scare?

NADYA: I'm afraid of you. Will you let the women go to their husbands?

BOBOYEDOV: No, I won't. I'm a villain!

NADYA: Of course you are if you're a gendarme. Why don't you want to let the women go to their husbands?

BOBOYEDOV (*politely*): For the present that is impossible. Later, when the men are led away, I shall allow them to say good-bye.

NADYA: But why is it impossible? It all depends on you, doesn't it?

BOBOYEDOV: Upon me . . . that is, upon the law.

NADYA: What has the law to do with it? Let them go, please do.

BOBOYEDOV: What has the law to do with it? You, too, are defying the law? Tut! Tut!

NADYA: Don't talk to me like that. I'm not a child.

BOBOYEDOV: Aren't you now? Only children and revolutionaries defy the law.

NADYA: Then I'm a revolutionary.

BOBOYEDOV (*laughing*): Oho! Then I've got to put you in jail! Arrest you and put you in jail!

NADYA (*unhappily*): Don't make a joke of it. Let them go.

BOBOYEDOV: That I cannot do. It's the law.

NADYA: Crazy law.

BOBOYEDOV (*seriously*): Hm. You shouldn't say that. If, as you claim, you are not a child, you must realize that laws are made by those in power, and without them there could be no state.

NADYA (*hotly*): Laws, power, the state! But for goodness' sake, weren't all these things made for the sake of the people?

BOBOYEDOV: Well, now . . . er . . . of course. That is, first of all for the sake of order.

NADYA: But such order must be wrong if it makes people cry. We don't need power and the state if they make people cry! The state! How stupid! What do I want with it? (*Goes to the door.*) The state! Why do people talk about things they don't know anything about?

(*Goes out. Boboyedov is confounded.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*to Tatyana*): A remarkable young lady, but with dangerous tendencies in her thinking. Her uncle, it seems, is a man of liberal views. Am I correct?

TATYANA: You should know better than I. I don't know what is meant by liberal views.

BOBOYEDOV: Don't you, now? Everybody knows that. Contempt for those in power—that's what liberalism is. But to change the subject. I have seen you in Voronezh, Madame Lugovaya. Yes indeed, I was enchanted by your acting. Simply superb! You may even have noticed me—I always sat next to the Vice-Governor. At that time I was an adjutant in the local administration.

TATYANA: I see. But I don't remember you. There are gendarmes in every town, I believe.

BOBOYEDOV: Oh, yes indeed. In every town, without exception. And let me tell you it's us, the officials, who are the true lovers of art. Well, maybe the merchants, too. Take, for example, contributions to buying a gift for a favourite actress on the occasion of her benefit performance—you'll find the names of all the officers of the gendarmerie on every list. That is, so to say, a tradition with us. May I ask where you intend to act during the coming season?

TATYANA: I haven't yet decided. But of course in a town where there are sure to be true lovers of art. That, it seems, is inevitable?

BOBOYEDOV (*missing the point*): Oh, yes indeed. You'll find them in every town. After all, people are becoming more cultivated.

KVACH (*from the verandah*): They are bringing that fellow, sir—the one who did the shooting. Where do you want him?

BOBOYEDOV: In here. Bring them all in here. Call the prosecutor. (*To Tatyana.*) I beg your pardon, but I must tend to business for a little while.

TATYANA: Are you going to interrogate them?

BOBOYEDOV (*politely*): Just the least little bit. Quite superficially—only to make their acquaintance. A sort of roll-call, so to speak.

TATYANA: May I be present?

BOBOYEDOV: Hm. It isn't, of course, the accepted practice. Not in political cases. But since this is a criminal case, and we are not on our own premises, and I should like to afford you this pleasure—

TATYANA: No one will see me. I shall watch from over here.

BOBOYEDOV: Good. I am happy to be able to repay you in some measure for the delight your acting has afforded me. I must just go and fetch certain papers.

*(He goes out. Two middle-aged workers bring Ryabtsov in from the verandah. Beside them walks Kon, stealing glances into the prisoner's face. They are followed by Levshin, Yagodin, Grekov and several other workers. Gendarmes.)*

RYABTSOV (*angrily*): What did you tie my hands for? Untie them! Hear me?

LEVSHIN: Untie his hands, fellows. Why humiliate him?

YAGODIN: He won't run away.

ONE OF THE WORKERS: We're supposed to. The law demands that we tie his hands.

RYABTSOV: I won't have it! Untie them!

ANOTHER WORKER (*to Kvach*): May we, sir? The fellow is quiet enough. It's hard to believe he could have been the one—

KVACH: Very well. Untie them.

KON (*suddenly*): You've got the wrong fellow! This one was on the river when the shooting took place. I saw him myself and so did the General! (*To Ryabtsov.*) Speak up, you fool. Tell them it wasn't you. Why don't you speak?

RYABTSOV (*firmly*): I'm the one who did it.

LEVSHIN: He ought to know best, soldier.

RYABTSOV: I'm the one.

KON (*shouting*): That's a lie! You're up to some

mischief! (*Enter Boboyedov and Nikolai Skrobotov.*) When that happened you were rowing on the river and singing. Deny it if you can!

RYABTSOV (*calmly*): That was later.

BOBOYEDOV: This fellow?

KVACH: Yes, sir.

KON: No, not him.

BOBOYEDOV: What? Kvach, take the old man out. How did he get in here?

KVACH: He's attendant on the General, sir.

NIKOLAI (*scrutinizing Ryabtsov*): Just a minute, Bogdan Denisovich. Leave him alone, Kvach.

KON: Keep your hands off. I'm a soldier myself.

BOBOYEDOV: That's all right, Kvach.

NIKOLAI (*to Ryabtsov*): Are you the one who killed my brother?

RYABTSOV: I am.

NIKOLAI: Why did you do it?

RYABTSOV: He treated us bad.

NIKOLAI: What's your name?

RYABTSOV: Pavel Ryabtsov.

NIKOLAI: I see. What is it you were saying, Kon?

KON (*greatly disturbed*): He didn't kill him! He was on the river when it happened! I'm ready to swear to it. The General and I both saw him. The General even said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could upset his boat and give him a ducking?" That's what he said. Do you hear me, you young whipper-snapper? What is it you're up to?

NIKOLAI: Why are you so sure he was on the river at the time of the murder, Kon?

KON: It's a good hour's walk from the factory to the place where he was.

RYABTSOV: I ran.

KON: He was rowing a boat and singing. You don't sing when you've just killed a man.

NIKOLAI (*to Ryabtsov*): Do you realize that the law is very severe towards anyone giving false evidence and attempting to shield a criminal? Do you realize that?

RYABTSOV: I don't care.

NIKOLAI: Very well. So you are the one who killed the director?

RYABTSOV: Yes, I am.

BOBOYEDOV: The brute!

KON: He's lying!

LEVSHIN: You don't belong here, soldier!

NIKOLAI: What's that?

LEVSHIN: I say he don't belong here and keeps interfering—

NIKOLAI: What makes you think *you* belong here? Perhaps you're implicated in the murder?

LEVSHIN (*laughs*): Me? Once I killed a rabbit with a stick and couldn't get over it for a week.

NIKOLAI: Then keep your mouth shut. (*To Ryabtsov.*) Where's the revolver you used?

RYABTSOV: I don't know.

NIKOLAI: What kind was it? Describe it.

RYABTSOV (*uneasy*): What kind? The usual kind.

KON (*rejoicing*): The son of a gun! He never saw a revolver!

NIKOLAI: How big was it? (*Indicating half a yard with his hands.*) About this long?

RYABTSOV: Yes. Oh no, less.

NIKOLAI: Bogdan Denisovich, just a second. (*He leads Boboyedov aside and lowers his voice.*) There's something underhanded being done. We'll have to be more severe with this boy. Let's leave him alone until the coroner comes.

BOBOYEDOV: Why should we? He confesses to everything.

NIKOLAI (*impressively*): You and I suspect that this

boy is not the murderer, but merely a shield for the true culprit, understand?

*(Yakov, obviously drunk, comes in and stands near Tatyana, silently looking on. From time to time his head drops on his chest as though he were drowsing off, then, jerking it up suddenly, he glances about with a frightened look on his face.)*

BOBOYEDOV (*uncomprehendingly*): Ah-h-h. Hm. Yes, yes. Fancy that!

NIKOLAI: It's a frame-up. A collective crime.

BOBOYEDOV: The rascal!

NIKOLAI: Let the Corporal take him out now, and see that he is kept in strict solitary confinement. I'm going out for a minute. Come with me, Kon. Where's the General?

KON: Digging worms.

*(They both go out.)*

BOBOYEDOV: Kvach, take this fellow out, and keep an eye on him! A sharp eye, mind!

KVACH: Yes, sir. Come on, youngster!

LEVSHIN (*affectionately*): Good-bye, Pavel. Good-bye, friend.

YAGODIN (*unhappily*): Good-bye, Pavel.

RYABTSOV: Good-bye. It's all right.

*(They lead Ryabtsov out.)*

BOBOYEDOV (*to Levshin*): Do you know him, old man?

LEVSHIN: Of course, I do. We work together.

BOBOYEDOV: What's your name?

LEVSHIN: Yefim Yefimovich Levshin.

BOBOYEDOV (*quietly to Tatyana*): Watch developments now. (*To Levshin.*) Tell me the truth, Levshin; you're an old and sensible man. You should always tell your superiors the truth.

LEVSHIN: Yes, indeed. Why should I lie?

BOBOYEDOV (*gloating*): Good. Well, then, tell me honestly, what's hidden behind the icons in your house, eh? The truth, remember!

LEVSHIN (*calmly*): Nothing.

BOBOYEDOV: Is that the truth?

LEVSHIN: Yes, it is.

BOBOYEDOV: Shame on you, Levshin! Here you are, grey-haired and going bald, and yet you lie like a little boy. Your superiors know even what you think, let alone what you do. For shame, Levshin. What are these things in my hand?

LEVSHIN: I can't see. My eyesight's bad.

BOBOYEDOV: I'll tell you what they are. They're books which have been prohibited by our government, books challenging the people to rise up against their tsar. These books were found behind the icons in your house. Now what have you to say?

LEVSHIN (*calmly*): Nothing.

BOBOYEDOV: Do you admit that they belong to you?

LEVSHIN: Maybe they do. All books look alike.

BOBOYEDOV: Why do you lie in your old age?

LEVSHIN: I told you the honest truth, sir. You asked me what was behind the icons in my house, and once you asked me such a question I knew there couldn't be anything there because you'd have taken them. So that's what I said: nothing. Why are you trying to make me feel ashamed? I've done nothing to be ashamed of.

BOBOYEDOV (*confused*): So that's the way you look at it! But I must ask you not to talk so much. I'm not a person to be fooled with. Who gave you these books?

LEVSHIN: Why should you want to know that? I can't tell you, because I've already forgotten where I got them. Don't let a little thing like that worry you.

BOBOYEDOV: Wha-at? Very well! Alexei Grekov! Which of you is Grekov?

GREKOV: I am.

BOBOYEDOV: Were you arrested in Smolensk in connection with the spreading of revolutionary propaganda among the craftsmen?

GREKOV: Yes, I was.

BOBOYEDOV: Such a young person, and so talented! Very glad to make your acquaintance. Gendarmes, take these people out on the verandah. It's getting stuffy in here. Yakov Viripayev? Good. Andrei Svistov?

(*The gendarmes lead them all out on the porch and Boboyedov follows with the list in his hand.*)

YAKOV (*softly*): I like those people.

TATYANA: I understand. But why is everything so simple for them? Why do they speak so simply and look at you so simply? Why? Have they no passions? No heroism?

YAKOV: They have a calm faith in the justice of their cause.

TATYANA: It can't be that they are without passions—or heroism. I can fairly feel their contempt for everybody here.

YAKOV: That Levshin is splendid. What sad, affectionate, understanding eyes he has! He seems to be saying, "What's the sense in all this? If you'd only get out of the way and give us our freedom! If you'd only get out of our way!"

ZAKHAR (*glancing through the door*): The stupidity of these gentlemen who represent the law is simply amazing. A fine trial they've cooked up! Nikolai Vasilyevich acts like a world conqueror.

YAKOV: The only objection you have, Zakhar, is that all this business is being carried on under your nose.

ZAKHAR: Well, they might have spared me the pleasure! Nadya has gone stark mad. She was insolent to Paulina and me, called Cleopatra a wildcat, and now she

is sprawling on the divan in my room crying her eyes out. Heaven only knows what is going on!

YAKOV (*thoughtfully*): I am growing more disgusted every minute, Zakhar.

ZAKHAR: I sympathize with you, but what else could we do? When a person's attacked, he has to defend himself. There's not a corner in the house that seems like home any more. Everything is upside down. And the rain makes everything so cold and damp. Such an early autumn!

(*Nikolai and Cleopatra come in in an excited state.*)

NIKOLAI: Now I am convinced that they bribed him!

CLEOPATRA: They couldn't have thought that up themselves. There's someone with a good head on his shoulders involved here.

NIKOLAI: You suspect Sintsov?

CLEOPATRA: Who else? Ah, Captain Boboyedov.

BOBOYEDOV (*entering from the verandah*): At your service!

NIKOLAI: I am convinced that that young boy has been bribed. (*Speaks in a whisper.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*softly*): Oh-h! Hm-m.

CLEOPATRA (*to Boboyedov*): Do you understand?

BOBOYEDOV: Hm. Fancy that! The rascals!

(*Nikolai and the Captain disappear through the double doors in animated conversation. Cleopatra glances about and sees Tatyana.*)

CLEOPATRA: Oh! So here you are!

TATYANA: Has anything else happened?

CLEOPATRA: I don't suppose it makes any difference to you. Have you heard about Sintsov?

TATYANA: Yes.

CLEOPATRA (*challengingly*): He's been arrested. I'm very glad they've weeded out all the bad elements at the factory at last. Aren't you?

TATYANA: I don't think it matters to you how I feel.

CLEOPATRA (*with malicious pleasure*): You were in sympathy with that Sintsov. (*Her face softens as she watches Tatyana.*) What a strange look you're wearing! And your face seems drawn. Why is that?

TATYANA: The weather, I suppose.

CLEOPATRA (*coming up to her*): Listen, perhaps this is stupid, but I'm the one who always speaks her mind. I've seen a lot of life; I've suffered a lot, and become embittered. I know that only a woman can be a woman's friend.

TATYANA: You want to ask me something?

CLEOPATRA: Tell you something. I like you. You're always so free in your manners, so well dressed, and so at ease with men. I envy you your walk and your manner of speaking. But sometimes I don't like you. I even hate you.

TATYANA: That's interesting. Why?

CLEOPATRA (*in an odd voice*): Who are you?

TATYANA: That is—

CLEOPATRA: I can't make out who you are. I like to have a clear picture of people and to know what they want. It seems to me that people who aren't sure of what they want are dangerous. They can't be trusted.

TATYANA: That's a strange thing to say. Why should you tell me your views?

CLEOPATRA (*impetuously and with alarm*): People ought to live in close friendship, so that they could trust each other. Can't you see what's happening? They're killing us off! They want to rob us! Haven't you noticed the thievish faces on those men who have been arrested? Oh, they know what they want! They live in close friendship! *They* trust each other! I hate them and I'm afraid of them!

We live at enmity, not believing in anything, not bound by anything, every man for himself. We depend on soldiers and gendarmes—they depend on themselves. And they're stronger than we are.

TATYANA: I, too, should like to ask you a question. Were you happy with your husband?

CLEOPATRA: Why do you ask that?

TATYANA: Sheer curiosity.

CLEOPATRA (*after a moment's consideration*): No. He was always too busy with other matters to think of me.

PAULINA (*entering*): Have you heard? It turns out that that clerk Sintsov is a Socialist. And Zakhar always told him everything and even wanted to make him assistant book-keeper! Of course that isn't of any great importance, but just think how complicated life has become! Your born enemies can live beside you without your ever suspecting it!

TATYANA: Thank goodness I'm not rich!

PAULINA: You won't say that when you're old. (*Gently.*) Cleopatra Petrovna, they're expecting you for a fitting. They've sent the crepe.

CLEOPATRA: Very well. My heart is beating so! I can't bear to have anything the matter with me.

PAULINA: If you wish, I can give you some drops for your heart. They really help.

CLEOPATRA (*going out*): Very kind of you.

PAULINA: I'll join you in a second. (*To Tatyana.*) We must be more gentle with her—it acts as a sedative. I'm glad you spoke with her. I envy you, Tanya. You have the knack of always finding a comfortable, neutral position. I'll go and give her some drops.

(*When she is left to herself, Tatyana looks out on to the verandah where the soldiers have lined up the men who have been arrested. Yakov pokes his head through the door.*)

YAKOV (*teasingly*): I was standing here eavesdropping all the time.

TATYANA (*absent-mindedly*): They say it isn't nice to eavesdrop.

YAKOV: It's very unpleasant to overhear what people say. It makes you pity them. Well, Tanya, I'm leaving.

TATYANA: Where are you going?

YAKOV: I don't know yet. Good-bye.

TATYANA (*affectionately*): Good-bye. Write to me.

YAKOV: This place has become detestable.

TATYANA: When are you leaving?

YAKOV (*with an odd smile*): Today. Perhaps you'll leave too?

TATYANA: Yes, I intend to. Why are you smiling?

YAKOV: For no reason in particular. We may never see each other again.

TATYANA: Nonsense!

YAKOV: Forgive me. (*Tatyana kisses his forehead. He laughs lightly as he pushes her away.*) You kissed me as if I were a corpse.

(*He goes out slowly. As Tatyana watches him, she has an impulse to follow him, but she checks it and makes a weak little gesture. Nadya comes in. She has an umbrella.*)

NADYA: Come out into the garden with me, please do. I have a headache from crying. I've been crying like a fool. If I'm alone I'll begin again.

TATYANA: Why should you cry, child? There's nothing to cry about.

NADYA: It's all so vexing. I can't make head or tail of it. Who's right? Uncle says he is, but I don't believe him. Is he a kind person—uncle? I always thought he was, but now I'm not sure. When he talks to me I feel wicked and stupid. And when I begin to think about him and ask myself questions I don't understand a thing!

TATYANA (*sadly*): If you begin asking yourself questions you'll become a revolutionary, and you'll never be able to weather that storm, darling.

NADYA: Well I have to become something, don't I? (*Tatyana laughs softly.*) What are you laughing at? Of course, I do. A person can't go on living with his mouth hanging open, not understanding anything!

TATYANA: I'm laughing because everybody is saying that today—everybody—all of a sudden.

(*They go out, and are met on the way by the General and the Lieutenant. The latter nimbly steps out of their way.*)

GENERAL: Mobilization is essential, Lieutenant! It serves a double purpose—(*To Nadya and Tatyana.*) And where might you be going?

TATYANA: For a walk.

GENERAL: If you meet that clerk... er... what's his name? Lieutenant, what was the name of that fellow I introduced you to a while ago?

LIEUTENANT: Pology, sir.

GENERAL (*to Tatyana*): Send him to me. I'll be in the dining-room having tea with cognac and the Lieutenant, ha-ha-ha! (*Claps his hand over his mouth and glances about guiltily.*) Thank you, Lieutenant! You have an excellent memory. Very commendable. An officer should remember the name and face of every soldier in his regiment. When a soldier is a green recruit, he's a sly brute—sly and stupid and lazy. The officer crawls under his skin and rearranges everything to make a man out of the brute—a sensible man, one who knows his duty.

(*Zakhar comes in looking worried.*)

ZAKHAR: Uncle, have you seen Yakov?

GENERAL: No, I haven't. Are they serving tea in there?

ZAKHAR: Yes. (*The General and the Lieutenant go out. Kon, angry and dishevelled, enters from the verandah.*) Kon, have you seen my brother?

KON (*sullenly*): No. I'm keeping my mouth shut from now on. I wouldn't say so even if I had seen him. I've had my say, thank you.

PAULINA (*entering*): Those muzhiks have come again to ask you to postpone the payment of their rent.

ZAKHAR: They've chosen a fine time!

PAULINA: They complain there was a bad harvest and so they have nothing to pay with.

ZAKHAR: They're always complaining. You didn't happen to see Yakov anywhere, did you?

PAULINA: No. What shall I tell them?

ZAKHAR: The muzhiks? Let them go to the office. I don't intend talking to them.

PAULINA: But there's nobody in the office. You know yourself that everything's in an upheaval. It's almost lunch-time, but that corporal keeps asking for tea. The samovar hasn't been taken out of the dining-room since morning. We're living in a mad-house!

ZAKHAR: Do you know that Yakov has suddenly taken it into his head to go away?

PAULINA: It's a good thing, even if I shouldn't say so.

ZAKHAR: You're right, of course. He's become very annoying of late—always talking nonsense. Just a while back he kept pestering me to know if one could kill a crow with my revolver. He was very insulting. Then he went off and took the revolver with him. He's always drunk.

(*Sintsov enters from the verandah in the care of two gendarmes and Kvach. Paulina looks at him through her lorgnette and goes out. Zakhar adjusts his glasses in some embarrassment, and moves away from him as he speaks.*)

ZAKHAR (*reproachfully*): Very unfortunate, Mr. Sintsov. I am extremely sorry, extremely.

SINTSOV (*smiling*): Don't let it trouble you. It isn't worth it.

ZAKHAR: Yes, it is! People should sympathize with one another. Even if a person whom I trusted has proved unworthy of my trust, I still consider it my duty to sympathize with him when he is overtaken by misfortune. That is how I see it. Good-bye, Mr. Sintsov.

SINTSOV: Good-bye.

ZAKHAR: You have no complaints to make of me?

SINTSOV: None whatever.

ZAKHAR (*embarrassed*): Good. Well, good-bye. Your salary will be forwarded to you. (*Going out.*) This is unbearable! My house has been turned into a kind of headquarters for the gendarmes.

(*Sintsov chuckles. Kvach keeps studying him intently, especially his hands. On noticing this, Sintsov stares back at him. Suddenly Kvach smiles.*)

SINTSOV: Well, what's so amusing?

KVACH (*happily*): Nothing. Nothing at all.

BOBOYEDOV (*coming in*): Mr. Sintsov, you are being sent into town.

KVACH (*happily*): He isn't Mr. Sintsov at all, sir. He's somebody quite different.

BOBOYEDOV: What's that? Be more explicit.

KVACH: I know him. He used to work at the Bryansk factory, and there his name was Maxim Markov. We arrested him there two years ago, sir. He has no nail on his left thumb. I know him. He must have made an escape if he's living under a false name.

BOBOYEDOV (*pleasantly surprised*): Is that the truth, Mr. Sintsov?

KVACH: It's the honest truth, sir.

BOBOYEDOV: So you aren't Sintsov at all! Well, well, well!

SINTSOV: Whoever I am, you're obliged to be civil. Don't forget that!

BOBOYEDOV: Oho! It's easy to see you're not a person to be fooled with! You'll be in charge of him, Kvach. Keep your eyes open!

KVACH: You can be sure I will, sir!

BOBOYEDOV (*happily*): Well then, Mr. Sintsov, or whatever your name is, we're sending you into town. (*To Kvach.*) As soon as you get there, tell the authorities all you know about him and immediately demand his police record—but I had better see to that myself. Stay here, Kvach. (*Hurries out.*)

KVACH (*amiably*): So here we meet again!

SINTSOV (*smiling*): Are you glad?

KVACH: Why not? An old acquaintance.

SINTSOV (*with disgust*): I should think you'd have had enough of this by now. Your hair's gone grey, and still you go on tracking people down like a dog. Don't you find it degrading?

KVACH (*amiably*): Oh, I'm used to it—been at it for twenty-three years. And not at all like a dog! The higher-ups have a good opinion of me—promise me a decoration. Now they're sure to give it to me.

SINTSOV: On my account?

KVACH: Yes. Where did you run away from?

SINTSOV: You'll find out in due time.

KVACH: That we will. Remember that dark-haired fellow in glasses at the Bryansk factory—Savitsky? He was a teacher, I think. We arrested him again, too. Not long ago. But he died in jail—very sick, he was. After all, there aren't many of you.

SINTSOV (*pensively*): There will be lots of us—just wait.

KVACH: Glad to hear it. The more politicals, the better for us!

SINTSOV: More awards?

(*Boboyedov, the General, the Lieutenant, Cleopatra and Nikolai appear in the doorway.*)

NIKOLAI (*looking at Sintsov*): Somehow I expected this. (*Disappears.*)

GENERAL: A fine chap he turned out to be!

CLEOPATRA: Now it's clear who the instigator was.

SINTSOV (*sarcastically*): Doesn't it seem to you that you are conducting this very clumsily, Captain?

BOBOYEDOV: Don't try to teach your betters!

SINTSOV (*insistently*): But I must. Do put an end to this absurd show!

GENERAL: Hear that?

BOBOYEDOV (*shouting*): Kvach! Take him away!

KVACH: Yes, sir. (*Leads Sintsov away.*)

GENERAL: Must be a real tiger, eh? Does he roar?

CLEOPATRA: I'm certain he started everything.

BOBOYEDOV: That's probable—highly probable.

LIEUTENANT: Will there be a trial?

BOBOYEDOV (*smiling*): Oh, no. We gobble them down without any sauce. They're just as good without it.

GENERAL: Like an oyster—smack!

BOBOYEDOV: We'll make quick work of dividing up the game, sir, and relieve you of all this nuisance. Nikolai Vasilyevich! Where are you?

(*Everyone goes out. The Chief of Police enters from the verandah.*)

CHIEF OF POLICE (*to Kon*): Will the examination be held in here?

KON (*sullenly*): I don't know. I don't know anything.

CHIEF OF POLICE: A table, papers—evidently it is to be held in here. (*Addressing someone out on the veran-*

*dah.*) Bring them all in here! (*To Kon.*) The deceased made a mistake. He said it was a red-head who shot him, but it turns out the criminal is dark.

KON (*muttering*): Even the living make mistakes.

(*Again they bring in the men who have been arrested.*)

CHIEF OF POLICE: Line them up over there. Take your place at the end of the line, old man. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you old devil?

GREKOV: Why should you use such language?

LEVSHIN: Don't bother, Alexei. He isn't worth it.

CHIEF OF POLICE (*threateningly*): I'll show you!

LEVSHIN: That's his job—to insult people.

(*Nikolai and Boboyedov come in and sit down behind the table. The General takes his place in an armchair in the corner with the Lieutenant standing behind him. In the doorway stand Cleopatra and Paulina who are later joined by Tatyana and Nadya. Zakhar looks unhappily over their shoulders. Pology appears, hitching in cautiously, bowing to those sitting at the table and stopping in confusion in the middle of the room. The General beckons to him. He goes over on tiptoe and stands by the General's armchair. They bring in Ryabtsov.*)

NIKOLAI: Attention! Proceedings have begun. Pavel Ryabtsov?

RYABTSOV: Well?

BOBOYEDOV: Not "Well," you fool, but "Yes, Your Honour."

NIKOLAI: Do you insist that it was you who killed the director?

RYABTSOV (*annoyed*): I've already told you so. What else do you want?

NIKOLAI: Do you know Alexei Grekov?

RYABTSOV: Who's he?

NIKOLAI: The fellow next to you.

RYABTSOV: He works at our place.

NIKOLAI: You are acquainted with him?

RYABTSOV: We're all acquainted with each other.

NIKOLAI: I understand. But do you visit him and spend your free time with him? In other words, do you know him well? Are you his friend?

RYABTSOV: I spend my free time with all of them. We're all friends.

NIKOLAI: Is that so? I'm afraid you're not telling the truth. Mr. Pology, be so good as to tell us just what is the relationship between Ryabtsov and Grekov?

POLOGY: A relationship of close friendship. There are two groups represented here. The younger one is headed by Grekov, a young man who is most insolent in his attitude toward people incomparably his superiors. The elder group is headed by Yefim Levshin, a person of fantastic speech and foxy manners.

NADYA (*softly*): The wretch!

(*Pology looks around at her, then turns enquiringly to Nikolai. Nikolai also glances at Nadya.*)

NIKOLAI: Go on.

POLOGY (*sighing*): They are linked by Mr. Sintsov, who is on good terms with all of them. This individual does not resemble the average individual with a normal mind. He peruses all kinds of books and has his own views on everything. His flat, which I might add is just across the hall from mine, consists of three rooms—

NIKOLAI: You may omit details.

POLOGY: I beg your pardon, but truth requires completeness of form. All types of people visit his apartment, including some who happen to be present here—namely, Grekov, and—

NIKOLAI: Grekov, is that true?

GREKOV (*calmly*): Ask me no questions. I refuse to answer them.

NIKOLAI: To no good purpose.

NADYA (*loudly*): Good for you!

CLEOPATRA: What does this mean!

ZAKHAR: Nadya, my dear—

BOBOYEDOV: Sh!

(*Confusion out on the verandah.*)

NIKOLAI: I see no reason why we should tolerate the presence of those who do not belong here.

GENERAL: Hm. Just what do you mean by those who do not belong here?

BOBOYEDOV: Kvach, go and see what all that noise is.

KVACH: Someone is trying to force the door, sir. Swearing and trying to get in, sir.

NIKOLAI: What does he want? Who is he?

BOBOYEDOV: Go and find out.

POLOGY: Is it your desire that I go on, or shall I discontinue my testimony?

NADYA: Loathsome creature!

NIKOLAI: Discontinue. I must ask those who do not belong here to leave!

GENERAL: Just how am I to take that?

NADYA (*shouting energetically*): You are the one who doesn't belong here! Not me, but you! You don't belong anywhere! This is my house! I have a right to demand that you get out!

ZAKHAR (*to Nadya in exasperation*): Leave at once, do you hear me? At once!

NADYA: Do you mean it? Very well. And so I really don't belong here. I'll go away, but first let me tell you—

PAULINA: Take her in hand, or she'll say something dreadful!

NIKOLAI (*to Boboyedov*): Tell the gendarmes to close the doors.

NADYA: You have no conscience! No heart! You're all miserable and contemptible!

KVACH (*entering joyfully*): Another one wants to confess, sir!

BOBOYEDOV: What?

KVACH: Another murderer has given himself up!

(*Akimov, a young chap with reddish hair and a long moustache, walks unhurriedly over to the table.*)

NIKOLAI (*involuntarily starting up*): What do you want?

AKIMOV: I'm the one who killed the director.

NIKOLAI: You!

AKIMOV: Yes, me.

CLEOPATRA (*quietly*): You wretch! So you've got a conscience!

PAULINA: Good heavens! What horrible people!

TATYANA (*calmly*): These people will win out in the end.

AKIMOV (*sullenly*): Well, here I am. Are you glad?

(*General embarrassment. Nikolai whispers something to Boboyedov, who smiles in confusion. Those who have been arrested stand silent and motionless. Nadya stands looking at Akimov from the doorway and crying. Paulina and Zakhar whisper together. The quiet voice of Tatyana is distinctly heard in the silence.*)

TATYANA (*to Nadya*): Don't cry; these people will win out in the end.

LEVSHIN: Tck, Akimov! You oughtn't to have—

BOBOYEDOV: Silence!

NADYA (*to Akimov*): Why did you do it? Why?

LEVSHIN: Don't shout, sir. I'm older than you are.

AKIMOV (*to Nadya*): You don't understand. You'd better go out.

CLEOPATRA: And what a saint that wretched old man pretended to be!

BOBOYEDOV: Kvach!

LEVSHIN: Well, what are you waiting for, Akimov? Speak up. Tell how he stuck a revolver in your chest, and that's why—

BOBOYEDOV (*to Nikolai*): Do you hear what he's teach ing them, the old liar?

LEVSHIN: I am *not* a liar!

NIKOLAI: Well, how do you feel now, Ryabtsov?

RYABTSOV: Quite all right.

LEVSHIN: Don't say anything. Keep your mouth shut. They're sly. They can use words better than we can.

NIKOLAI (*to Boboyedov*): Throw him out!

LEVSHIN: Oh, no you don't! There's no throwing us out! Enough of your rowdy methods! We've been kept in the dark without any rights long enough! Now we've caught fire, and none of your threats can quench our fire! None of them—ever!

**CURTAIN**

# OLD MAN

29—977

## CHARACTERS

IVAN VASILYEVICH MASTAKOV, *40-45 years old, a merchant*

PAVEL, *20-22 years old, his stepson*

TANYA, *18 years old, his stepdaughter*

ZAKHAROVNA, *an old servant who brought up the children*

STEPANICH, *60 years old, a watchman*

SOPHIA MARKOVNA, *33 years old, widow of an army colonel*

KHARITONOV, *48 years old, a merchant*

YAKOV, *25 years old, his nephew*

A STONE-MASON

AN OLD MAN

A YOUNG GIRL

## ACT I

*A three-storied brick building under construction is seen in the background. In front of it are barrels of lime, piles of boards and building materials, a clump of trees with broken branches. Under the trees a straight-backed bench; on the left of the stage—a fence with a gate in it leading into a garden. Beside the gate—a lodge with another bench at the entrance door. On the right of the stage—trees and bushes. Noon of a Sunday in summer. A group of stone-masons are standing in front of the new building. Mastakov, a sturdy dark-haired man with a smattering of grey in beard and moustache, is addressing them. At the garden gate: Kharitonov, a red-haired, fidgety little man; Yakov, his foppish nephew; Pavel, a glum, awkward lad; Tanya, dressed loudly and in the latest style; Zakharovna and Stepanich.*

KHARITONOV (*calling to the stone-masons*): Quiet, plebs!

MASTAKOV (*glancing at him reproachfully*): Just a minute, Yakim. Well, men, one job's done with, thank the Lord, and on Monday we'll begin another. You worked

hard and honestly and deserve to be thanked for it. I do thank you, fellows; I do indeed.

KHARITONOV (*to Pavel*): There's no spirit in his words. If *I* was to thank them, now!

MASTAKOV: Have you any complaints to make to me?

STONE-MASONS: Oh, no. We thank you in turn. No complaints.

MASTAKOV: Good. It wasn't only for me you worked—you worked for yourselves as well. Your children and grandchildren will study in this school. Future generations will enjoy the fruits of our labour.

KHARITONOV (*to Yakov*): It's the colonel's widow put those ideas in his head.

YAKOV: Uh-huh.

TANYA: Hush, I can't hear what he says.

MASTAKOV: As a matter of fact, work is always of more value than money. I myself come of simple folk and I appreciate the value of all kinds of work. (*He speaks haltingly, searching for words, and his hesitation increases as he goes on.*)

KHARITONOV: Why doesn't he wind it up? They don't understand what he's talking about anyway.

MASTAKOV: And so the building of this trade school is over. Heaven grant that the lives of our children may be better and happier than ours. Say what you will, the fortunate are more deserving of God's help than the unfortunate.

KHARITONOV: That's all the colonel's widow.

TANYA: Please stop talking!

ZAKHAROVNA: Oh, deary me!

MASTAKOV: And now go and have dinner. Drink to our final success, and—well, congratulations on the finishing of this job.

STONE-MASONS (*in enthusiastic chorus*): Many thanks, Ivan Vasilyevich! Many thanks to you! Come along, fellows! Wait! Thanks, master.

MASTAKOV: You each have three rubles coming to you as a further mark of gratitude.

STONE-MASONS (*even more enthusiastic*): Hear that?... A thousand thanks!... Well, come along.... Wait a minute! Thanks!

OLD STONE-MASON: Wait! Quiet, men! I, too, have a word to say, Ivan Vasilyevich. Very kind it is of you to treat us to dinner—another would have handed us each a ruble for a drink and sent us off. But not you—you do everything different and better. Most folk fall flat when they try to be different, but not you. It's a pleasure to work for such a master. If everybody acted like you, there'd be less hard feelings. Folk do like to have a little pleasure once in a while. We're content, too, Ivan Vasilyevich, and we make you a bow to show our thanks. Bow to the master, mates. (*He makes a low bow, the stone-masons mutter*: "Thanks, master." "May you be successful in all you do!" "Many thanks!" *A consumptive lad falls on his knees and bows to the earth in obvious mockery.*)

TANYA (*smiling*): How silly!

KHARITONOV: The brat!

MASTAKOV: That's not nice, my boy. Well, be off with you, men. If you need anything, Nikita Semyonov, ask Zakharovna for it.

STONE-MASON: Thank you, don't trouble yourself any more on our account.

(*The workmen go out, followed by Kharitonov, Pavel, Yakov and Zakharovna. Tanya puts her foot on the bench to tie her shoe-lace.*)

KHARITONOV (*to the young folk*): Come along, let's watch them guzzle.

MASTAKOV (*to the old stone-mason*): I'm particularly grateful to you.

STONE-MASON: Don't mention it.

MASTAKOV: Why are you grinning?

STONE-MASON: It's a pleasure to look at you. I've seen lots of folk in my day, but I'd rather look at you than at most of them.

MASTAKOV: Get along. You'll be late for dinner.

STONE-MASON: You're always building something, always doing something. Real talent you've got, but you're in too much of a hurry. You'll wear out quick.

MASTAKOV: We've been told not to hide our light under a bushel.

STONE-MASON: Who told us?

MASTAKOV: Christ, in the Bible.

STONE-MASON: Oh, then of course. But the more haste, the more waste, as the saying goes. Well, good day to you. And so we begin the new job on Monday?

MASTAKOV: On Monday.

STONE-MASON: Good day to you.

(*Goes off. Mastakov looks about him wearily.*)

TANYA (*coming up to him*): Let's go and have dinner.

MASTAKOV: You here alone?

TANYA: Everyone else went to watch them eat. There's no fun in that.

MASTAKOV (*softly*): You're always alone, dear. You oughtn't to be.

TANYA: It was nice, what you said to them. And the old man is nice, too.

MASTAKOV: Talks too much, but he's clever. And he knows his job.

TANYA: I don't like most muzhiks, but some of them are nice.

MASTAKOV: Why shouldn't you like them? I'm a muzhik myself.

(*Pavel appears among the trees.*)

TANYA: You a muzhik? You're a merchant.

MASTAKOV: We're all alike. We're muzhiks, only we dress differently and talk differently. But people aren't to be judged by their clothes and their speech—it's their work that counts. The person who knows how to work is the one who deserves respect. You, for instance, are a lazy little loafer. Why is that?

TANYA: I don't know. Am I?

MASTAKOV (*ruminatively*): A muzhik, that's what I am —a real, honest-to-goodness muzhik.

TANYA: Why do you call me lazy?

MASTAKOV: Ask yourself that question. Do you like Yakov?

TANYA: Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't.

MASTAKOV: Hm. It would be better if you liked him all the time. What answer will you give when he asks you to marry him?

TANYA: I've given it already. I told him to wait.

MASTAKOV: For what?

TANYA: I don't know. Maybe . . . oh, we'll see. Why hasn't Sophia Markovna come?

MASTAKOV: She said she'd be late for mass. Why? What do you want her for?

TANYA: She's so awfully nice.

(*Pavel disappears. Zakharovna comes in.*)

MASTAKOV: You have too few friends, Tanya.

TANYA: Why are you so glum today?

MASTAKOV: Am I? I don't know.

ZAKHAROVNA: Dinner's ready.

MASTAKOV: Good. Here, this money is for the workmen, Zakharovna. Give it to Nikita. Come along, Tanya.

(*Stepanich appears near the lodge with a gun in his hand.*)

STEPANICH: (*singing to himself*):

Poor old Vanya, there he's sitting
In the blessed pen again....

ZAKHAROVNA: What are you doing with a gun in broad daylight?

STEPANICH: Scaring off thieves. There's a suspicious-looking character prowling about. Keeps asking about the master—who he is, where he's from....

ZAKHAROVNA: What does he want?

STEPANICH: He don't say. Seems to me he's been sent scouting by a band of thieves.

ZAKHAROVNA: Don't you go telling him nothing.

STEPANICH: Have no fear. I've spoken to the master about him.

ZAKHAROVNA: Call the Kharitonovs to dinner.

STEPANICH: Here they come without any calling.

KHARITONOV (*to Pavel and Yakov*): Learn from him how to manage your affairs.

ZAKHAROVNA: Dinner's ready, Yakim Lukich.

KHARITONOV: Coming. He runs his business smooth as oil, while I'm plagued by strikes and creditors.

YAKOV: The colonel's widow helps him.

KHARITONOV: Fiddlesticks. A woman's no help when it comes to business.

PAVEL: She'll suck him dry. He gave her seven hundred rubles' worth of silver as an Easter present and a ruby bracelet for her birthday.

KHARITONOV: You know all the figures, don't you? Aren't you smart!

STEPANICH (*winking in their wake*): It's a mean little skunk you brought up, Zakharovna.

ZAKHAROVNA: A mother's own children don't always turn out to be saints.

STEPANICH: Nothing ever puts a damp on you. A very bright and chipper old lady you are.

ZAKHAROVNA: I wept all my tears long ago. Come what may, I'm always gay.

PAVEL (*to Stepanich*): Hey, you! My stepfather left the bills somewhere. Go and look for them.

ZAKHAROVNA: For shame! What do you mean by talking to your elders like that!

PAVEL: Get out of here, nanny!

ZAKHAROVNA: A fool, that's what you are.

(*She goes into the garden. Pavel sits down on the bench and lights a cigarette. He hears the voice of Sophia Markovna coming from the bushes and tries to catch the words.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*off stage*): Don't unhitch the horses. I'll soon be back. (*Comes out of the bushes, pushing them back with her parasol. She is slightly over thirty, dressed with piquant simplicity.*) Did I see you shake your fist at me? Or turn up your nose?

PAVEL (*surprised*): You did not.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Are you sure?

PAVEL: I was just looking to see who was coming.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Swear to it?

PAVEL: Why should I?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Oh, dear! Can't you take a joke?

(*Pavel grows silent.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Have many guests come?

PAVEL: Only the Kharitonovs.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What are you doing here?

PAVEL: Nothing.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*taking his arm*): That's very little indeed.

PAVEL: You tease me as if I were a child.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Do I? Poor chap! Come along.

STEPANICH (*with the bills*): Here, I found them. How do you do, my lady.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: How do you do, my gentleman.

(*She goes out, taking Pavel with her. Stepanich sits down on the bench and watches them go with a smile on his face. From behind the lodge comes the old stone-mason.*)

STEPANICH: Where are you going?

STONE-MASON: The men are too noisy for me.

STEPANICH: Having a good time?

STONE-MASON: I'm not feeling up to scratch. Old age, I guess.

STEPANICH: Hm.

STONE-MASON: A good man, Ivan Vasilyevich. And a good merchant, too. Where's he come from?

STEPANICH (*with a little laugh*): Funny. Do you think there's some special land where all the good folk come from? As if never a good man was born among us.

STONE-MASON: There is no such land.

STEPANICH: No, there isn't. There's another chap keeps asking where the master comes from and how he got rich.

STONE-MASON: He got rich from his brains. A fool'll never get rich. What makes him ask?

STEPANICH: What makes you?

STONE-MASON: Me? Oh, I just asked out of curiosity.

STEPANICH: He did too.

STONE-MASON: Curiosity's a sign of foolishness.

STEPANICH: You ought to know.

STONE-MASON: A sure sign of foolishness. Who's that coming?

STEPANICH: The master and the colonel's widow.

STONE-MASON: I'll just step into the lodge. How does

the saying go? "A guest is best when seen to the door, your boss—when seen at a distance."

(*He goes out, followed by Stepanich. Through the gate come Sophia Markovna and Mastakov, who seems preoccupied.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I don't think you ought to have left the table.

MASTAKOV: Oh, Yakim's an old friend of mine. You said you were in a hurry, but I wish you'd sit down here for a minute.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*smiling*): What about your new job?

MASTAKOV: Yakim is holding us up with the bricks—his creditors seized them. Sophia Markovna....

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What is it? I can see something's troubling you. You're so absent-minded and—

MASTAKOV: There's good reason for it. I hardly know how to tell you—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Out with it. Well?

(*She sits down on the bench, Mastakov stands in front of her showing marked agitation.*)

MASTAKOV: For over ten years I've been living according to your teachings. You've lent me money besides. And moral support.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Sit down. (*Looks with a smile at her watch, then at him.*) Can't you come to the point?

MASTAKOV: You see ... I just can't say it. It's too much for me.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*studying him gravely*): You surprise me! You, who are always so composed and self-confident.

MASTAKOV: On the surface. I'm very unlucky, Sophia Markovna. (*Resentfully.*) It's—it's preposterous! Why should I find myself in such a position? I'm honest and hard-working and not grasping—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: But what has happened? Tell me!

MASTAKOV: You mean so much to me! You've become so much a part of my life, that if.... For years I lived like a lone wolf, afraid of people, avoiding them. And then I met you. You helped me get over it. You made a man of me.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: There's no reason for saying all this now.

MASTAKOV: I have such deep respect for you—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Thank you, I'm very glad, but—what is it you want of me?

MASTAKOV (*throwing himself on his knees*): Your mercy! Your help!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*jumping up and glancing about*): Are you mad? Get up this very minute! You might as well make love to me in the market-place! Like a hot-headed schoolboy!

MASTAKOV (*getting up*): You won't judge me too harshly, I know. You are compassionate—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Enough of this. I'm not a child. I know that you like me. I'm very outspoken—perhaps even rude at times. I like you too. Isn't that enough? I can't say more at present. You've chosen a very bad time for an exchange of confidences.

MASTAKOV (*dully, meekly*): I thought—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: At seven o'clock I'm leaving for the country. When I come back we'll have a talk. That will be in three days.

MASTAKOV: Don't go, please don't. I beg you not to. My life... everything's upset—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What nonsense you are talking!

MASTAKOV (*almost in despair*): I must tell you!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Hush. Somebody's coming. Look, you've got dust on your knees.

MASTAKOV (*under his breath*): My God!

KHARITONOV (*tipsy*): Your hand, Sophia Markovna!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: But you and I just exchanged greetings.

KHARITONOV: What of it? You're like a bank-note—always met with pleasure. (*To Mastakov.*) What are you looking so sour about, old man?

MASTAKOV (*nodding in the direction of the unfinished building*): We're behind with the building.

KHARITONOV: Pooh, pooh! Things always turn out all right for you. You're lucky. Sophia Markovna, can't you do something to make him marry his stepdaughter to my Yakov? Why shouldn't you, Ivan Vasilyevich? It'd make things easier for you and be doing me a good turn at the same time.

MASTAKOV: This is no time to talk of that.

KHARITONOV: It's always time to marry off the girls. Except during Lent. We're quarrelling over a mere twenty thousand rubles, Sophia Markovna. A disgrace!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Bargain with him.

KHARITONOV: I'm ready to, but he's neither here nor there nor up in the air. What's twenty thousand in these days of corruption? A pot of cream, no more. On the other hand, my Yakov's a suitor to be proud of. Sleek as a pedigreed bull. More like a tiger than a suitor.

MASTAKOV (*glumly*): You'll take all the money away from him.

KHARITONOV: Time will tell. In money matters friendship and kinship don't count.

MASTAKOV (*testily*): You're a greedy son of a gun.

KHARITONOV: Me greedy? A lot you know about me!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Do you know a lot about yourself?

KHARITONOV: I know myself through and through. Me greedy? Pshaw!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Are we going to take a look at the building?

MASTAKOV: Yes.

KHARITONOV: I'll come too. Me greedy! At Eastertide

I lost nine thousand at cards and didn't even blink, while you—

MASTAKOV: You've been drinking, Yakim.

KHARITONOV: I have. Because I live such a paltry sort of a life. I'm not much to look at, so the women won't have me without money. Life's a bore, so I try to put a kick into it by drinking and gambling.

MASTAKOV: You'll come to a bad end.

KHARITONOV: Anybody can go down a beaten path, but it's the unbeaten ones I like—over the bumps and the stumps, over the bogs that threaten to suck you down, so that you're always saying to yourself: going to get out of this, Yakim, or going to go under? That's the only way to get any fun out of life.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You're talking well today.

KHARITONOV: I'd talk better if some nice woman would fall in love with me. Ah, Sophia Markovna, there's enough beauty in you to give a man all the twelve fevers at once. If only *you'd* love me now, I'd—

MASTAKOV (*roughly*): Shut up, you clown!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*shocked*): What!? Think what you're saying!

KHARITONOV (*frightened*): What's that?

MASTAKOV: Let him hold his foul tongue.

(*Sophia Markovna takes his arm.*)

MASTAKOV: Forgive me, Yakim. I had something on my mind, and you—

KHARITONOV: On your mind! A fine thing! The way you shot that out! Aren't you afraid of him, Sophia Markovna? I confess I am at times.

(*They go off in the direction of the building. Pavel stands at the gate and watches them. Zakharovna's voice comes from the garden. Tanya appears.*)

TANYA (*to Pavel*): Let me pass.

PAVEL: Don't push, you little rowdy!

TANYA: Who are you spying on?

PAVEL: None of your business.

TANYA: What a boor! Why are you always so nasty?

PAVEL: Just because.

TANYA: You don't know why yourself.

ZAKHAROVNA (*grumblingly*): If you've got a headache you oughtn't to go out in the sun.

TANYA: Leave me alone! Has Sophia Markovna gone, Pavel?

PAVEL: I don't know.

TANYA: I forgot to tell her—

ZAKHAROVNA: Always forgetting! Where are you going? You'll sprain your ankle climbing over all that rubbish, you little minx! Running off like this and leaving your sweetheart all alone!

TANYA: I told you I have no sweetheart!

ZAKHAROVNA: But you have.

TANYA: I have not!

ZAKHAROVNA: Don't fly off the handle. A sweetheart's not a wart—no reason to boast of not having one.

TANYA: Why do you keep pestering me?

ZAKHAROVNA: Why do you keep pestering *me*?

PAVEL: What a fool!

TANYA: Mind your own business if you're so wise! Go and see if she's gone, Zakharovna.

ZAKHAROVNA: Why didn't you say that in the first place? You're too lazy to go yourself.

TANYA: You told me not to!

ZAKHAROVNA: Don't listen to me—out of respect for my old age.

TANYA: You're impossible.

(*Stepanich comes shouting down the path.*)

STEPANICH: Zakharovna, where's the money for the workmen?

ZAKHAROVNA: Here it is. Stop making so much noise. Why don't you give it to them yourself, Tanya? They'd like to have it from you.

TANYA (*walking off*): What makes you think so?

ZAKHAROVNA (*going after her*): The little vixen!

YAKOV (*from the garden*): Where are they going?

PAVEL: To give the workmen their tips.

YAKOV: A lot of money?

PAVEL: I don't know. Something over a hundred all together.

YAKOV: If only somebody'd give *me* a hundred-ruble tip!

PAVEL: Hire out as a butler.

YAKOV (*lighting a cigarette*): Thanks. A student I know writes jingles for the humorous papers, and one of them goes:

> Wait on people—you're no gent;
> Do it well, and then you'll see:
> No money is more wisely spent
> Than that on tips to servantry.

That's saying it with a smile, not lamming people over the head with insults as you do.

PAVEL: Who's it meant for, that jingle?

YAKOV: Anybody. Have a smoke?

PAVEL: No thanks. I'm not fond of jokes.

YAKOV: Then let's be serious. Shall we go and see the girls tonight?

PAVEL: I'm not in the mood. (*Frowning.*) How's that? Here you are thinking of marrying my sister, and yet you ask me to go wenching with you.

YAKOV (*surprised*): I like that! Is this the first time I've invited you to go? Where were you last Sunday?

PAVEL (*morosely*): My stepfather wants to send me to a commercial school.

YAKOV: What's the objection? You'll live alone—be your own boss.

PAVEL: If I go away he's sure to marry that—

YAKOV: He's sure to marry her anyway. What can you do to stop him? Forget it! Let him marry whoever he likes. All you want is your share of the money.

PAVEL: That's it. I'm afraid he won't give it to me.

YAKOV: Let's go for a walk. And take Tanya with us.

PAVEL: I don't mind. (*They go towards the building.*) I wish you'd talk about the widow to Tanya more often.

YAKOV: I talk about her often enough, have no fear.

PAVEL: If only we could break things off between them!

YAKOV: Tanya's quite gone on her.

PAVEL: She's young and foolish—has no mind of her own.

ZAKHAROVNA (*coming to meet them*): A handsome pair of drakes! The heat's quite gone to the head of that uncle of yours, Yakov Savelich. There's no sense to what he says, but his language is enough to make the bricks blush. Go and take Tanya away from him.

(*She goes into the garden. Pavel and Yakov disappear among the trees. Presently Mastakov is seen in the bushes gazing at the building and wiping the sweat off his forehead with his handkerchief. He looks distraught.*)

MASTAKOV (*under his breath*): She didn't understand... didn't guess....

(*After a moment's consideration he goes resolutely over to the bench, takes his wallet out of his pocket and writes a note, leaning on his knee.*)

MASTAKOV .(*calling*): Stepanich! Hey, Stepanich!

STEPANICH (*coming out from behind the lodge*): Here I am, master!

MASTAKOV: Harness Beauty and drive into town to Sophia Markovna's. If you overtake her on the road—

STEPANICH: No chance of that.

MASTAKOV: Then go straight to her house, and if she's not at home, go to the station. She's leaving for the country by the seven o'clock train. Be sure to find her. Hurry.

STEPANICH: And who'll take over?

MASTAKOV: Don't stop to talk. Nikita will see to the workmen. I'll tell him to.

STEPANICH: They're in a state to set the house afire.

MASTAKOV: Hurry, I tell you!

(*Stepanich hurries out.*)

MASTAKOV (*under his breath*): What's going to happen? God knows I'm innocent.... I'm innocent.... (*He sinks down on the bench and sits rocking back and forth, clutching his head in his hands.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT II

*The same scene on the same day. Five o'clock in the evening. In the fields beyond the building site someone is playing an accordion. Nikita, the old stone-mason, is drowsing on the bench in front of the lodge. Out of the bushes come Pavel, Yakov and Tanya, who is carrying a bouquet of wild flowers.*

YAKOV (*winking in Nikita's direction*): Want to see me give him a scare?

PAVEL: He's not asleep.

TANYA: Don't.

YAKOV: I'll give you a laugh.

(*He goes over to Nikita and stands staring at him intently.*)

STONE-MASON (*getting up*): What do you want, young man?

YAKOV: I seem to know you.

STONE-MASON (*smiling*): Everybody around here knows me.

YAKOV: But I seem to have known you for a long, long time.

STONE-MASON: I've known you just as long.

YAKOV: Who are you?

STONE-MASON (*still smiling*): Why do you ask if you know me?

YAKOV (*sharply*): I'm not joking. There's something I know about you that—

STONE-MASON (*solemnly*): What do you know? There's nothing to know about me.

YAKOV (*lowering his voice*): What were you doing in March 1903? Remember?

STONE-MASON (*searching his memory*): In March? 1903?

YAKOV: Yes. Now do you remember?

STONE-MASON: Just a minute, just a minute....

YAKOV: Where were you then? Tell me that.

STONE-MASON (*growing confused*): Wait... let's see... seems I was in hospital then.

YAKOV: Seems! I want to know where you *really* were.

STONE-MASON (*frightened*): Listen, what are you getting at, young man?

YAKOV: No side-tracking! Remember what you were doing then?

STONE-MASON: What the devil are you up to? (*Snatches off his cap.*) There's nothing for me to remember, youngster. Leave me alone.

(*Tanya smiles as she watches the old man, Pavel bursts out laughing. Seeing this, Nikita puts his cap back on and gives a disgusted wave of his hand.*)

STONE-MASON: To hell with you! I thought you was in earnest. Such tricks, and me three times your age! (*Goes angrily into the lodge.*)

YAKOV (*triumphantly*): Well, it worked, didn't it?

PAVEL: Very slick.

TANYA: Why should he have been so frightened?

YAKOV (*proudly*): I can scare anybody like that. Just go up to him and look him in the eye and say: "Oh, what

I know about you!" I don't know anything, of course, but the person's sure to get scared—after all, everybody's got something he hides from people, and I just pretend to know his secret. See how it works?

PAVEL: People are such fools.

YAKOV: It works best with girls. I can make any girl cry in half an hour.

TANYA: But that's horrid! Aren't you ashamed?

YAKOV: What's there to be ashamed of?

TANYA: Of teasing the girls.

YAKOV: What do you do to us boys? Humph! Well, you liked the way I fooled the old man, didn't you?

TANYA: No, I didn't.

YAKOV: Then what did you laugh for?

TANYA: I didn't.

PAVEL: Yes, you did; don't argue. Very smart of him I should say. Will you wait for me here? I want to run into the house and change my shirt—it's all sweaty.

YAKOV: Let's sit down, shall we?

TANYA: I don't feel like it.

YAKOV: Don't be angry. Listen to this: I saw a froggy in a boggy on a soggy-woggy loggy.

TANYA (*in surprise*): What?

YAKOV (*repeating it*): That's what's called a *bon mot.*

TANYA (*laughing*): I call it horrid. Did you make it up yourself?

YAKOV: I did.

TANYA: I don't believe you.

YAKOV: Honest to goodness. Don't you think it's funny?

TANYA: Not in the least.

YAKOV: Then what did you laugh for? There never was anybody so unreasonable!

*(They sit without speaking for a little while.)*

YAKOV (*gloomily*): Once there was an actor who said:

"It's better to have little brains than big pimples." Do you like that?

TANYA (*smiling*): You're a perfect idiot.

YAKOV (*gaily*): Anything to amuse you. But you *are* unreasonable. I'll bet the salesmen in the shops can't stand you.

TANYA (*injured*): I don't care whether the salesmen in the shops can stand me or not.

YAKOV: You ought to. Some of them are very handsome.

TANYA: Oh, leave me alone!

YAKOV: You've quite worn me out.

TANYA (*getting up*): Poor thing! Let's go and have tea.

YAKOV: You go. I'll come later. (*Shakes his fist behind her back and sticks out his tongue.*)

TANYA (*turning round*): I feel so tired!

YAKOV (*jumping up*): I'm very sorry. (*To himself.*) Just you wait, my pretty one!

(*From the garden comes the voice of Mastakov saying*: "You'd better lie down and take a nap.")

KHARITONOV (*at the gate*): I don't want to sleep, I want to talk.

MASTAKOV: What about?

KHARITONOV: Let's sit down here, in your favourite spot. Weren't you sorry to cut down that copse?

MASTAKOV: Very.

KHARITONOV: I thought so. Look what's left—not enough to whittle a toothpick out of. Sit down. What makes you so glum and unsociable today?

MASTAKOV: You just imagine it.

KHARITONOV: Do you think I'm blind just because I've had a little drink? I see much better when I've got a drop inside me. You're jumpy and keep peering into corners. What's the reason?

MASTAKOV: Oh, nothing in particular. I've got something on my mind. Building is what I love above everything else. Building beautifies this earth of ours—a poor sort of earth.

KHARITONOV: You're wrong. It's a rich sort of earth. We suck it and suck it, but nobody can suck it dry.

MASTAKOV: And life is so uncertain....

KHARITONOV: Everybody sucks it—the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, but Russia goes right on living, praised be the Lord! And she'll go on living to the end of time. But you look as bleak as an autumn day—makes a fellow want his overcoat. Lonesome for the widow, is that it? Can't blame you for that—she's one that anyone would pine for. Going to marry her?

MASTAKOV: I don't know. I'm no match for her.

KHARITONOV: Why not? Her husband was somebody, but they say she comes of simple stock. A singer or something of that sort, wasn't she? In a word, a woman with a past.

MASTAKOV (*sharply*): The past is the past.

KHARITONOV: But if it's in your bones?

MASTAKOV: What do you mean?

KHARITONOV: If it's part of your—well, soul, shall we say? The past isn't tar on the fence that can be scraped off—oh, no! It goes deep, brother.

MASTAKOV (*getting up*): Sorry, but I've got to go. There's a matter I must give some thought to.

KHARITONOV (*calling after him*): Give some thought to your stepdaughter! We've wasted enough words—it's time to get down to business.

(*Nikita glances out of the lodge.*)

KHARITONOV: Who's there?

STONE-MASON: Me. (*Comes out.*) I've got a complaint to make to you, Yakim Lukich.

KHARITONOV: Let's hear it.

STONE-MASON: That nephew of yours is always up to mischief.

KHARITONOV: Even chickens make mischief when they're young. Well?

STONE-MASON: He tried to threaten me—

KHARITONOV: Don't be afraid of him. Let him threaten all he likes, just don't pay any attention to him, see?

*(From behind the lodge comes the Old Man in pilgrim's attire with a knapsack on his back, a pot and tea-kettle hanging from his belt. Behind him comes the Young Girl, also with a knapsack on her back. She has an expressionless face and big lacklustre eyes. The Young Girl bows. The Old Man stands motionless.)*

KHARITONOV: Hullo. Isn't this a pleasure, just!

STONE-MASON: Where have you come from?

OLD MAN: From Stephen's.

KHARITONOV: Is she your daughter?

OLD MAN: She's my soul sister.

KHARITONOV: Youngish for a sister.

OLD MAN: We weren't all born the same year.

KHARITONOV: Quite right.

YOUNG GIRL (*to the Stone-Mason*): What's that they're building?

STONE-MASON: A school.

KHARITONOV: Is she a maid?

OLD MAN: She is.

YOUNG GIRL: Isn't it a factory?

STONE-MASON: No, the factory's further—three versts or so.

KHARITONOV: How many children has she had?

OLD MAN: One, but it was simple-minded too.

STONE-MASON: We're going to begin building another one soon.

KHARITONOV: Simple-minded? (*Gets up, goes into the garden.*) Why don't you ask alms?

OLD MAN: There's a time for everything.

KHARITONOV: Hm. Well, it's time for me to have tea.

YOUNG GIRL: Who's building it?

STONE-MASON: Mastakov, Ivan Vasilyevich.

OLD MAN: Does he live here?

STONE-MASON: Yes.

OLD MAN: Born here?

STONE-MASON: Why should you want to know that?

YOUNG GIRL: I've heard it said the folk here are a good sort.

STONE-MASON: There are all kinds.

OLD MAN: Has he been living here long?

STONE-MASON: Going on twenty years. (*Stopping and glancing at the Old Man suspiciously.*) What makes you think he wasn't born here? I didn't say he wasn't.

YOUNG GIRL: They say he's kind-hearted.

STONE-MASON: Sometimes he is, sometimes he isn't. He don't like good-for-nothings.

OLD MAN: What are good-for-nothings?

STONE-MASON: Folk that the wind blows up and down the roads.

YOUNG GIRL: Let's go, brother.

OLD MAN: Where to? We'll have a rest first. I'm in no hurry. Nobody's waiting for me.

STONE-MASON: You don't look like a pious pilgrim.

OLD MAN: Don't I? What do I look like?

STONE-MASON: I don't know. You don't talk like one, either.

OLD MAN: Every bird has its own song.

STONE-MASON: You don't look like a pilgrim at all. If it's alms you're after, go into the courtyard—that way, round the corner.

OLD MAN: What's the hurry? Want to get rid of me?

STONE-MASON: Not particularly, but why should you

hang about? You'll be lighting your pipe and throwing a match down.

OLD MAN: I don't smoke.

(*Nikita goes into the lodge.*)

OLD MAN (*to the Young Girl in a low voice, after first glancing furtively about*): Keep your eyes open, Marina. Eyes and ears. Take notice of everything, and if you scent danger, run into town, to Ilya—

YOUNG GIRL: I know.

OLD MAN: He'll go straight to the police and tell them everything. Don't forget.

YOUNG GIRL: I won't.

OLD MAN (*looking about*): Look how they've built everything up, the hyenas. Shut out the sky. Trying to cut themselves off from God, the heretics. Hiding their iniquity behind brick and stone.

YOUNG GIRL (*softly*): Look—someone's coming.

(*Enter Yakov and Tanya.*)

YAKOV: Do tell me.

TANYA: Wait. Where could he be? (*Calls.*) Father!

YAKOV: We'll find him later. Tell me first.

TANYA: It's tiresome to tell people things.

YAKOV: But you like to listen, don't you?

TANYA: If it's interesting. Father!

YAKOV: Gossip's always interesting.

TANYA: Uh-huh.

YAKOV: The gossips turn a fellow inside out.

(*The Young Girl bows to them.*)

TANYA: Pilgrims always know a lot of gossip.

YAKOV: She looks as if she was made of wood. Here, let me give him a scare.

TANYA: I wouldn't.

YAKOV: You'll see how funny it'll be. (*Staring intently at the Old Man.*) My God, is it you?

(*The Old Man stares back at him unperturbed.*)

YAKOV: Have you been here long?

OLD MAN: Not very.

YAKOV: Going back to jail soon?

OLD MAN: Soon as you.

YAKOV: Me? What do you mean?

OLD MAN: Just that. When are you thinking of going back?

YAKOV: There's no reason why I—

OLD MAN: They'll find a reason.

YAKOV (*embarrassed*): How dare you—!

TANYA (*holding him back*): Don't touch him. He's a rude old man.

YAKOV (*walking away*): No scaring him, the tramp!

YOUNG GIRL: Haven't you got something for a pair of poor homeless pilgrims, miss? Something to eat, something to drink? In the name of Christ.

TANYA: Go and ask in the kitchen—over there. Where could father be?

YAKOV: He'll come.

TANYA: What a dull day! If only something would happen!

YAKOV: A fire, for instance. Do you like fires?

TANYA: I'm afraid of them. But sometimes I get so bored I'd be glad to have anything happen, no matter how awful it was.

YAKOV: Marry me.

TANYA: I'm not joking. Sophia Markovna said she didn't know what it meant to be bored. How can that be? Even dogs get bored sometimes. Do you like apricots?

YAKOV: I like you.

TANYA: Oh, stop it!

YAKOV: Really I do. Why don't you want to marry me? It'd be such fun! We'd buy an automobile.

TANYA: I told you I wanted to think it over.

YAKOV: You're taking a mighty long time about it. Getting married isn't like playing bridge—you don't have to think. I'm broad-minded, light-hearted, and easy-going. And I'm poor, so you can be sure I'd be faithful. Honest to goodness. You can do whatever you like when you're my wife.

TANYA: I can do that now.

YAKOV: No, you can't, because you're not married and you've got to be on your guard. We men are robbers who prey on inexperienced girls. Once you're a married woman you'll know what it means to do as you like. Take Sophia Markovna, for instance—she has one affair after another.

TANYA (*regretfully*): They say such horrid things about her!

YAKOV: You don't have to let your appetite be spoiled by what people say. And as for Pavel—he's mean and coarse and has no use for anybody.

TANYA: Oh no, you're mistaken. He's in love with Sophia Markovna.

YAKOV: Pavel? I don't believe it!

TANYA: Yes, he is. I myself saw him kiss her gloves.

YAKOV: Who'd ever have thought it!

TANYA: She left her gloves at our house—

YAKOV: And he kissed them? The silly ass! Well, she's sure to be your stepmother one of these days.

TANYA: I'm glad of it.

YAKOV (*glumly*): I don't know why.

TANYA: There'd be a clever woman in the house I could talk to about frocks and things. And if she was here we'd remodel the house. It's too small for us.

KHARITONOV (*enters*): Ah, the lovey-doves! Where's Ivan Vasilyevich?

YAKOV: We couldn't find him.

KHARITONOV: The architect has come.

TANYA: Oh, I must go and see him. He's charming! (*Hurries out.*)

KHARITONOV: Well, how're things progressing? Slow?

YAKOV: Rather. She's so wishy-washy!

KHARITONOV: It's you that's wishy-washy! Anyone else'd—

YAKOV (*resentfully*): I can't take her by force, can I?

KHARITONOV: Why not? The girls like to be taken by force. You blockhead! If it was me, the church bells would have been ringing long ago.

YAKOV: Go ahead and marry her yourself!

KHARITONOV: Tut-tut! Who are you talking to? You'll be in a pretty fix if I go up the flue and leave you without a kopek to your name!

YAKOV: Sh, somebody's coming—it must be Ivan Vasilyevich.

KHARITONOV (*glances round, then takes a silver ruble out of his pocket and speaks in a loud voice*): Take this coin, for instance—not very big, but the whole world rests on it. That's a thing you've got to appreciate. Prettier than a posy, stronger than gunpowder. Money's to be treasured, and not thrown recklessly about. (*Reverting to his former tone.*) What's the idea of fooling me? Nobody's coming.

YAKOV: I heard steps behind the lodge.

KHARITONOV: Steps! See that you wind up this business before the day's out. Go and find her. Don't let her out of your sight.

YAKOV: And if she's a half-wit?

KHARITONOV: All the better for you, idiot!

(*They go out. Mastakov comes slowly from the building site. His eyes are bent on the ground and he looks depressed. From behind the lodge comes the Old Man. He stops and stands with both hands on his stick, staring hard at Mastakov.*)

OLD MAN (*in a low voice*): Good day to you, Gusev.

MASTAKOV (*in the same tone*): Good day, Anton.

OLD MAN: I'm not Anton any more, I'm Pitirim. I made myself over, like you, except that there's no reason why I shouldn't go on being Anton. Why don't you look at me?

MASTAKOV: I've seen you.

OLD MAN: You have? Where? When?

MASTAKOV: On the porch of the church. And I saw you a minute ago walking down the road with a woman.

OLD MAN: So you've been expecting me? (*Mastakov makes no answer.*) If you recognized me you must have been expecting me.

MASTAKOV: I recognized you at the church—by your eyes.

OLD MAN: Well then, invite me to be your guest.

MASTAKOV (*wearily*): Listen, Anton, you're a clever man, you know what your coming here means to me. Don't beat about the bush—come right out with it: what do you want of me?

OLD MAN (*laughing and shaking his head*): Is that a nice thing to say? Here I've come to pay a visit to my old friend—you and me have been through a lot together, haven't we?—and you ask me what I want of you!

MASTAKOV: I can give you a neat little sum if—

OLD MAN: Money! What do I want with money? I'm old. I'll die soon.

MASTAKOV: That woman with you, is she—?

OLD MAN: She's a maid. A smart one. Tied tight to me.

MASTAKOV: Does she know about me?

OLD MAN: What do you think?

MASTAKOV (*seizing him by the shoulder*): Don't fool with me, you old rascal!

OLD MAN (*ducking adroitly to escape his grasp*): Come now, no rough handling if you please! (*The Young Girl comes out from among the trees.*)

OLD MAN: You can't scare me. There's no horror I haven't faced.

MASTAKOV: What do you want?

OLD MAN: To have a little talk with you.

MASTAKOV: What about?

OLD MAN: Oh, there's plenty for you and me to talk about.

MASTAKOV (*after a moment's pause*): Our paths parted long ago, Anton—

OLD MAN: But they've come together again, as you see.

MASTAKOV: Why can't you come straight out with it? What do you want?

OLD MAN: I want a lot.

MASTAKOV: Well?

OLD MAN: I want to get my full pay for all the years I suffered.

MASTAKOV: How much?

OLD MAN: I haven't added it up yet.

(*Mastakov locks his hands behind his back and stares at him in hatred.*)

OLD MAN: What are you looking at?

MASTAKOV: I haven't forgotten what sort of person you are.

OLD MAN: Haven't you? Thanks.

MASTAKOV (*despairingly*): What do you want of me, Anton?

OLD MAN: Scared, are you? One of life's little jokes, Gusev—here you are rushing about, building away, and I come quietly creeping up on you, little by little—

MASTAKOV: What harm have I ever done you? I don't know of any.

OLD MAN: Nor do I.

MASTAKOV: I took pity on you back in those days.

OLD MAN (*with a little laugh*): A man's got to know

how to take pity. It's not such a simple thing—taking pity on others.

MASTAKOV: And now you wish me harm?

OLD MAN (*pricking up his ears*): I'll tell you later what I wish. Somebody's coming, and there's a horse out in the road—hear it? I'll go into the kitchen and you send for me this evening, will you?

(*Mastakov nods. Zakharovna comes out of the garden.*)

ZAKHAROVNA: Good gracious, Ivan Vasilyevich, where have you been? We've been looking for you high and low!

MASTAKOV (*glumly*): Show this man to the kitchen and feed him.

ZAKHAROVNA: As if there was time for that today!

MASTAKOV: Do what you're told!

ZAKHAROVNA: They're waiting for you in there. (*To the Old Man.*) Come along.

OLD MAN: A stern master you've got.

ZAKHAROVNA: Hold your tongue.

OLD MAN: And you're a stern one too, it seems. What you need is the stick.

ZAKHAROVNA (*turning round*): What's that?

(*Mastakov shakes his finger at her. Left alone, he mutters to himself*: "God, it can't be! It can't!" *He turns and walks towards the building site and meets Sophia Markovna on the way. She appears to be upset about something.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What nonsense did you write me? I can't believe it! Are you mad? (*Seizes his hand.*) Speak! Tell me everything! Are you really an escaped convict?

MASTAKOV (*looking away*): I am. I was sentenced to four years.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What for?

MASTAKOV: I served two years and five months, then I ran away.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Impossible! Look me in the eye! What were you sentenced for? Counterfeiting?

MASTAKOV: Murder.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*pushing his hand away*): You, a murderer!? How did it happen?

MASTAKOV: I don't know.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Pull yourself together. You mustn't lose your head at a moment like this. How did it happen? Oh, hurry and tell me!

MASTAKOV: I don't know. That's what I said at the trial—I don't know. I was only twenty years old at the time—a recruit. We were drinking. Somebody knifed a cattle dealer. I was tipsy and didn't see him—I don't even know what he looked like. I didn't do it, but there was nobody else to blame, so they blamed me. They found a spot of blood on my clothes.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Whose blood?

MASTAKOV: I don't know. The recruits got into a fight —I was with them.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Are you telling the truth? Are you? But of course you are. You couldn't have ... no, you couldn't possibly! But why did you wait so long to tell me? Why didn't you tell me before?

MASTAKOV (*crushed*): A man has come here who was in exile with me. He has been searching me out—sent somebody to find out all about me. On Thursday I saw him on the porch of the church. I recognized him instantly.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You should have told me at once. I believe you—believe you implicitly.

MASTAKOV: I tried to tell you this morning, but you wouldn't let me.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: This morning? You mean. . . . Oh, how stupid I was! I thought. . . . How impossibly stupid! Forgive me.

MASTAKOV: I've been wanting to tell you for a long time, but I lacked the courage. It meant too much to me. I have no one in the world but you—you are a . . . a sister and everything else to me.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What does that man want?

MASTAKOV: I can't make him out. He'll ruin me.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You mustn't say that. Where is he?

MASTAKOV: In the kitchen. He's an evil creature. Help me, Sophia Markovna! I'll be your slave for the rest of my life! I want to live!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I won't let him hurt you.

MASTAKOV: I said to myself: "I'll live as she wants me to, and when the time comes I'll say: This is what I am! But my conscience is clear. You taught me to do good. Life held no meaning for me before I met you—"

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: This is no time to say such things.

MASTAKOV: Do you believe me?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: How can you ask? When are you going to speak to him?

MASTAKOV: This evening.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Arrange for me to hear what you say. I'll spend the night here. Be sure that the children don't find out anything.

MASTAKOV (*with a grim little laugh*): Pavel would be only too glad to.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: The main thing is to remain calm when you talk to him.

MASTAKOV: What if he should involve you in it?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Me? Nonsense! Let's go into the house.

MASTAKOV: Sophia Markovna—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Well? Take yourself in hand.

MASTAKOV: I'm afraid.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: That won't help you.

MASTAKOV: I'm afraid of what you will think of me.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: But you're innocent, aren't you? All of this is just a horrible mistake, isn't it?

MASTAKOV: It is! I swear to God it is!

*(They go out. The Young Girl appears in the bushes and scratches her chin as she gazes dull-eyed after them.)*

CURTAIN

## ACT III

*A large room with a writing-desk and three easy chairs in the middle of it. A lamp with a blue shade is lighted on the desk. Behind a screen in one corner can be seen the head of a bed. In the other corner is a tiled stove with a couch in front of it and a door hung with heavy draperies beside it. A big bookcase stands next to the door. In the wall facing the audience is another door. Mastakov is half-reclining on the couch. Somebody knocks at the door in the back wall.*

MASTAKOV (*getting up*): Yes?

ZAKHAROVNA: He's awake.

MASTAKOV: Bring him here.

ZAKHAROVNA: He's asked for tea.

MASTAKOV: Give it to him and then bring him here.

ZAKHAROVNA: Don't be so nice to him, Ivan Vasilyevich. There's something wicked about that old man.

MASTAKOV: That's all right. Run along.

ZAKHAROVNA: He keeps asking all sorts of questions about you—chiselling away, chiselling away.

MASTAKOV: What's that?

ZAKHAROVNA: Chiselling away—how you live, and what's your business, and who Sophia Markovna is—

MASTAKOV: Sophia Markovna?

ZAKHAROVNA: He pretends to know everything—as if he was just asking for the looks of it. Chiselling away like a judge getting at the truth.

MASTAKOV: A judge?

ZAKHAROVNA: A judge.

MASTAKOV: He used to know me when I . . . when I was poor. We lived together.

ZAKHAROVNA: We can't be nice to all the people we used to know.

MASTAKOV (*pacing the floor*): Is Sophia Markovna in Tanya's room?

ZAKHAROVNA: Yes.

MASTAKOV: Ask her to come here. Politely. Tell her I want to see her a minute. (*Somebody knocks. Zakharovna is about to open the door when Mastakov seizes her hand.*) Wait! Who is it?

ZAKHAROVNA: Good gracious! Who could it be, master, but one of our own folk?

MASTAKOV (*with suppressed anger*): You don't understand, you old fool!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: It's you who needs to be shouted at.

MASTAKOV: Be off with you, Zakharovna!

ZAKHAROVNA: I can see it's time for me to go. (*Goes out.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: How are you feeling?

MASTAKOV: Wretched.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Shame on you for being so easily frightened!

MASTAKOV: Matters are very serious.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: It's too soon to say that.

MASTAKOV: I know him.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: We'll see him and talk to him and give him whatever he wants. Then I'll quietly set about getting you a pardon. We'll find the best lawyer there is.

Money will buy anything. They say that is reprehensible, but what is one to do if there is no other way out?

MASTAKOV: I don't know what to say to him.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You don't consider yourself a criminal, do you? Then what have you to be afraid of?

MASTAKOV: You don't know what people can be like.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: We shall see. Where shall I hide?

MASTAKOV: Must you?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I'll sit here behind the bookcase and cover myself with the portiere. (*Smiling.*) I certainly never imagined I would be taking part in such an amazing scene!

ZAKHAROVNA (*entering glumly*): He don't want tea. Shall I show him in?

MASTAKOV: Yes, do.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: See, she didn't notice me. Be careful now, don't lose your temper.

MASTAKOV: What if you should get caught in this trap along with me? What would I ever do?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Hush!

(*She hides. Mastakov heaves a sigh as he looks in her direction. She peeps out from behind the portiere and smiles.*)

MASTAKOV (*with a grim little laugh*): Do you find it amusing?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Oh, yes. And the least bit frightening. Sh! They're coming!

(*Someone knocks. Zakharovna mutters to herself as she lets the Old Man and the Young Girl in. The Old Man turns to the corner where the bed stands and crosses himself, then sniffs the air.*)

MASTAKOV (*nodding in the direction of the Young Girl*): What did you bring her for?

OLD MAN: She's with me always, like my sins.

MASTAKOV: Send her out. I refuse to talk to you in front of her.

OLD MAN (*calmly settling himself in one of the easy chairs*): Oh, no; you won't refuse. Don't pay any attention to her. She's dumb as the earth—strike her, beat her, and not a sound will she make. But lay a hand on me and she'll raise a hue and cry.

MASTAKOV (*glowering at the Young Girl; she gazes about her with curiosity, feeling the upholstery of one of the chairs*): Sit down.

OLD MAN: Sit down, Marina, don't be afraid. (*Bouncing in the chair.*) Soft as a feather bed, these chairs of yours. But it's dark in here. Can't you give us more light?

MASTAKOV: No, I can't.

OLD MAN: You live in darkness. Comfortable and well-fed, but in darkness.

YOUNG GIRL: There's a good smell in here, like a baby's sweat.

OLD MAN: Take the shade off the lamp.

MASTAKOV: What for?

OLD MAN: To make it lighter. What sense is there in hiding the light? There, that's better. What are you going to treat me to?

MASTAKOV: Will you have some vodka?

OLD MAN: Oh, no! You'll not get me to drink vodka. You're a sly old fox, Gusev!

MASTAKOV (*striking the desk with his hand*): Out with what you have to say!

OLD MAN (*giving a little jump*): Don't you go hitting the desk like that again! Sounded like a gun shot. What do those windows open out on? Marina, have a look.

MASTAKOV: What are you after, Anton?

OLD MAN (*watching the Young Girl*): On the courtyard?

YOUNG GIRL: Yes. The kitchen's on that side.

MASTAKOV: What do you want?

OLD MAN: What should an old man like me want? I don't know myself.

MASTAKOV: Come out with it. Don't tempt me, Anton; don't make me lose my temper.

OLD MAN: And if you do?

MASTAKOV (*getting up*): I'll—I'll—

OLD MAN (*leaning back in the chair*): Well?

YOUNG GIRL: Don't shout, merchant; this place is full of people and it wouldn't sound nice. And keep away from him.

MASTAKOV: Hold your tongue!

OLD MAN: Keep quiet, Marina. I know him; he's hot-headed but he gets over it quick. He's really good at heart.

MASTAKOV: What do you want, Anton?

OLD MAN: I haven't decided yet. Don't be in such a hurry; I've got to think it over.

MASTAKOV: What a vicious creature you are!

OLD MAN: We're all birds of a feather.

(*Pause.*)

OLD MAN (*begins in a soft, plaintive tone, but grows sarcastic and imperious as he goes on*): So here we are, Gusev, sitting facing each other, you and me—both of us sinners, only I meekly paid for my sins as laid down by the law, while you escaped your lawful punishment. I withered and dried up in bondage, while you grew fat and sleek in riches, sitting in soft chairs. And now here we are, face to face. For seven years I searched for you—I was sure you was safe and sound and enjoying life. I was sure of it.

MASTAKOV: Say what you have to say quickly.

OLD MAN: Don't hurry, you'll burn your tongue—isn't that what they say to children when they sit down to their soup? Don't hurry, you'll burn your tongue. Well,

as I was saying, I searched for you everywhere. I wanted to get a look at a fellow bold enough to skip the law. Christ died for other people's sins, but you didn't want to suffer even for your own. Very bold you are.

MASTAKOV: I wasn't guilty of any crime—I was sentenced by mistake.

OLD MAN: Oh, I know—that's what we all say when we face the judgement of this earth, accused by our fellows. I said it myself.

MASTAKOV: I've lived an upright life all these years.

OLD MAN: So that's how it is! Oh, no, Gusev, that won't do. We'd all like to hide our sins behind an upright life. That's not the law. Who's to pay, eh? Jesus Christ Himself had to pay for breaking the ancient law. The law was: an eye for an eye, but Christ said: return good for evil.

MASTAKOV: I've done no little good to others.

OLD MAN: That I can't say. People live as they always have—in want and privation, and in the darkness of sin. And their lot seems to be growing worse, have you noticed that, Gusev?

MASTAKOV: What is it you want of me? What is it?

YOUNG GIRL: Don't stop him, don't interrupt—he don't like that.

MASTAKOV: Anton!

OLD MAN: My name is Pitirim. As for what I want—try to guess. You and me are of the same stock, yet for, twelve years I meekly, honestly paid for my sins with the suffering of a martyr, while you? You escaped the law.

MASTAKOV: So you want to hand me over? You want them to seize me?

OLD MAN: I haven't said what I want yet.

MASTAKOV: Very well, hand me over to the authorities and ruin my life. What benefit will it bring you?

OLD MAN: That's my business.

MASTAKOV: You haven't much time left to live.

OLD MAN: So I'll live it well.

MASTAKOV: You can't work.

OLD MAN: You've worked enough for both of us.

MASTAKOV: Let me live in peace, Anton. Who are you that you should judge me?

OLD MAN: Any man has a right to judge you. Why did you run away? Why did you refuse to suffer?

MASTAKOV: I wanted to live—to work—

OLD MAN: It's more holy to suffer than to work.

MASTAKOV (*wrathfully*): Of what use is suffering? What's the good of it? Who profits by it? Tell me that, you fiend!

OLD MAN: Don't bark at me! I've been barked at all my life. I've got you in my fist like a caught bird. What's it to me that you've made a soft little nest for yourself and found yourself a swell mistress—

MASTAKOV (*in fury*): How dare you! (*Hurls himself at him.*)

YOUNG GIRL (*rushing to the window*): Help!

OLD MAN (*dropping on to the floor behind the desk*): Break the window, Marina!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*springing out of the corner, pushing the Young Girl back against the desk, and seizing Mastakov by the arm*): Leave the room! And you, too, young lady—get out!

OLD MAN (*getting up and gazing round in fright*): So that's the underhand way you do things!

YOUNG GIRL (*cringing and holding on to the Old Man*): What's happened? And they call themselves respectable folk!

MASTAKOV (*rushing about the room*): For God's sake keep out of this, Sophia Markovna!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Leave the room! And you too, young lady!

OLD MAN: She won't go.

YOUNG GIRL: I won't go.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Take her out, Ivan Vasilyevich. And you sit down, Old Man. I want to talk to you.

OLD MAN (*sullenly*): I don't want to talk to you. Who are you? I don't know you.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You soon will.

OLD MAN: I'm going.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Come, now, no foolishness. Ivan Vasilyevich, I told you to leave. (*To the Old Man.*) Tell that girl of yours she's to go.

OLD MAN (*after some hesitation*): Go out, Marina, but stay near the door—close by, mind. And I want you to know you can't scare me, my fine lady!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I know that. I have no desire to scare you. (*She locks the door after Mastakov and the Young Girl and takes a chair opposite the old Man.*) Tell me briefly: what is it you want?

OLD MAN (*recovering*): What do you think?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You want to torture him, is that it? They tortured you, and now you want to get revenge by torturing him, am I right?

(*The Old Man stares at her without answering.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You resent the fact that he has found a place for himself in life and you haven't?

OLD MAN (*with a little laugh*): So you heard all we said, did you?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Well, you have tortured him. You've tortured him enough.

OLD MAN (*mockingly*): Enough? I see. Very simple.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: And now think back on all you've suffered and endured and ask yourself if it isn't time to have a rest, to live in peace and comfort?

OLD MAN: So that's what you're getting at! Don't think I'll fall for that, young lady.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I realize how deep your resentment is and how badly you want to get revenge.

OLD MAN: I thought you had something else to say—something clever and weighty. You've got spirit in you, young lady, but not much brains.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You're taking vengeance on the wrong person. It's not he who made you suffer.

OLD MAN: And what if I think everybody's guilty? What then?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: That's not true. It's not fair.

OLD MAN: And I say it is.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You were punished unjustly, weren't you?

OLD MAN (*after a pause*): Well?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Why should you, who have known the injustice of suffering, wish to make others suffer?

OLD MAN: Hm! That Gusev of yours wants to go to heaven in spite of his sins, does he? Well, heaven's not for him! It's for me, for poor unfortunates like me. That's the law. As for Gusev—if I'm to suffer, he's to suffer twice as much.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: But why? What an evil man you are!

OLD MAN: You intend to marry him, don't you? You wouldn't go to all these pains for a mere lover. A lover's a passing fancy—today a blond, tomorrow a brunet. Bah, you women! You all ought to be drowned, but there's no puddle stinking enough to drown you in.

(*Sophia Markovna walks back and forth in silence.*)

OLD MAN (*watching her mockingly*): What else have you to say?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Ivan Vasilyevich is a good man. He is always helping others.

OLD MAN: Building schools and things? It's not schools that need building, but shelters for wanderers. Folk wander from place to place and they need somewhere to spend the night.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Do you mean to say it will really give you pleasure to ruin him?

OLD MAN: So you've come to the end of your rope, have you? And how bravely you flew out of that corner! An eagle come to defend her young! I don't like happy folk. They're too smooth—nothing to catch hold of. They slip out of your fingers like wet soap. Well, looks like you couldn't get the better of me, young lady.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*in despair*): Will nothing soften your heart?

OLD MAN (*with a laugh*): Marry me. Kiss me, make love to me—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You beast!

OLD MAN: Maybe that'll soften it. As for my being a beast—I've heard that before. I don't mind. I get on very well being a beast.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: How dreadful!

OLD MAN: Don't like it? Then let's call it off, young lady. You can't feed sugar to a wolf. I've been sick to death of people for a long time now, and the ones I hate most are the nice clean ones like you.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*with a choking cry*): Is there nothing human about you at all?

OLD MAN: Yes, there is. Try and find it. But you won't—not you. What can you do to bring me round? Nothing. Not a word you say will move me. There aren't many years left to me, and those that are are cheerless. I spent all my youth in exile, and it's there I left the strength of my body. Do you think I didn't find a woman sweet in those days? Yet for twelve years I didn't touch a woman's breast. Day and night I sweated myself out

for you, and for that lover of yours. What are you squirming for? It hurts to hear the truth, doesn't it?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: The man you're revenging yourself upon is not the one who ruined your life. Believe me, he isn't.

OLD MAN: I have no time to look for the guilty ones. As for Gusev—here's where I've got him—like a caught bird. He didn't serve out his suffering. Why didn't he? I served out mine. Am I his judge? I am. His rightful, unrelenting judge. He tortured me all these years and now he wants to buy me off? Well, he won't! Never, never! A mountain of gold wouldn't pay for a single one of the tears I've shed. Let me out, hear? I've had enough of this.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: And is there no mercy—not the least little bit—in your heart?

OLD MAN: Enough, I say. You'll get nowhere with me. Mine's been a cruel life. (*Goes to the door and stops.*) The way you flew out of that corner, eh? I thought everything was up—thought I'd met my match. (*Laughs. Mastakov and the Young Girl appear in the doorway.*) I'm tired, Gusev. Time for me to go to bed. Show me the way. That's a mean old woman you've got in the kitchen —she gets on my nerves.

YOUNG GIRL: Come, brother, the beds are ready.

OLD MAN: A pretty lady you've got to defend you, Gusev—don't often meet them that pretty. She won't be of any help to you in court, but she's pretty just the same. (*To Sophia Markovna.*) When he gets sent back to Siberia, will you go with him? She won't, Gusev. Women don't stick to us when we're down. Ah, you poor, miserable creatures, the very sight of you wrings my heart. (*Goes out.*)

MASTAKOV (*in a low voice*): Go home, Sophia Markovna.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Not a word. What a horrible man! Just see what they've brought him to! I'm going up to town to ask advice. The public prosecutor is a good friend of mine. I'll be back tomorrow—or perhaps you had better come to my house. Yes, do that. You must get away from here. That Old Man is the devil incarnate. The way he looks at you! What eyes he has! Have you spoken to the girl?

MASTAKOV: Yes. She's like a mechanical toy.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Stupid?

MASTAKOV: Lifeless. Nothing will come of it, Sophia Markovna—there's nothing we can do. The judgement of one's fellow-men.... Men are very hard-hearted. I used to read the lives of the saints. Wonderful books. I found consolation in knowing how many of the saints had been sinners, and I would say to myself: I, too, will atone for my sins; I, too, will be forgiven.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: But how have you sinned? You say that—

MASTAKOV (*with a little laugh*): I hardly know myself. Oh, it's true I'm not guilty of murder or robbery. But as you see, he.... Perhaps there is something else I am guilty of. I don't know.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What was he sentenced for?

MASTAKOV: Rape.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*with a shudder*): Ugh. Look, let me speak to that girl of his.

MASTAKOV: I don't think you ought to.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Bring her in. I've got to tie his tongue for two or three days.

MASTAKOV: If anything should happen, take Tanya to live with you.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Don't let such thoughts come into your mind.

MASTAKOV: She's so helpless.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Go and bring the girl.

MASTAKOV (*going out*): There's no point in it. I despise myself.

(*Left alone, Sophia Markovna paces the floor in agitation. The door beside the stove opens softly and Zakharovna peers into the room.*)

ZAKHAROVNA (*in a whisper*): Sophia Markovna! (*Her whisper does not reach Sophia Markovna.*) Sophia Markovna!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*startled*): What! Were you there all the time? Did you hear?

ZAKHAROVNA (*tearfully*): As soon as he came I felt in my bones something awful was about to happen. I could see it in Ivan Vasilyevich's face. And soon after that I hear him say to that girl of his: "We'll sail out of here with a big cargo, you and me!"

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*not quite believing her*): You heard him say that? Really?

ZAKHAROVNA: Really. "Keep your eyes open, simpleton," he says. "Here's where your luck begins."

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*excited*): Are you sure you heard him say that?

ZAKHAROVNA: Sure as sure. I'm scared of him, and so I follow him about like his shadow and listen to everything he says.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*glad*): So that's how it is! He was just frightening me to raise his price, the wretch!

ZAKHAROVNA: Sophia Markovna—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Bring the girl to me.

ZAKHAROVNA (*softly*): Wouldn't it be better to get rid of the old man some other way?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What way?

ZAKHAROVNA: I know a way. I've got it.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*irritably*): Speak out. What way?

ZAKHAROVNA: Rat poison.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*stunned*): Arsenic?

(*Zakharovna wipes her eyes and nods her head.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*softly, in horror*): What are you saying! How dare you!

ZAKHAROVNA: I'd do it myself.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: That would be a crime, a sin, murder!

ZAKHAROVNA (*sighing*): I know.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: And you, a good woman like you, could do such a thing? You must be mad!

ZAKHAROVNA: How else can we get rid of him? He'll ruin the family—take everything they've got. He'll never give in. I know his kind: pious sinners, tattle-tales in the service of the Lord.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Did you really think I would agree to such a thing, or were you just testing me?

ZAKHAROVNA: Me test you? Oh, my—no.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Then why—? Or did you think Ivan Vasilyevich was capable of it?

ZAKHAROVNA: I told you I'd do it myself.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*frightened*): Good heavens, what's happening!

ZAKHAROVNA: You're a smart woman, with lots of book learning—will you really let that worm—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*almost in tears*): But can't you understand that that would be murder?

ZAKHAROVNA: What's to become of the children if the old man has his way? Think of the disgrace for Tanya! And Pavel? He'll go straight to the dogs. They've got their lives before them. And what'll happen to you?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Incredible! I forbid you even to think of such a thing, do you hear? Give me that arsenic this very minute.

ZAKHAROVNA: But you won't do it.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*indignantly*): Be off! You're insane. How dare you suspect me of such a thing! You've gone clean out of your mind, old woman.

(*Zakharovna stands without speaking.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*more calmly*): You'll ruin all of us with your wild ideas. Go and call the girl. (*A knock at the door. Mastakov brings in the Young Girl.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*to Mastakov*): Come here. (*Takes him aside and speaks in a whisper.*) Keep an eye on Zakharovna. She wants to poison the old man. She's got some arsenic—

MASTAKOV: Things get worse and worse.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Go out and take her with you.

MASTAKOV (*going out*): Come along, Zakharovna.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*to the Young Girl*): Sit down.

YOUNG GIRL: That's all right.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Please, sit down.

(*Smiling, the Young Girl sits down in an easy chair and pinches the stuff with her fingers.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Your guardian—

YOUNG GIRL: My brother. The Old Man.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: He wants to ruin the owner of this house. Do you know that?

YOUNG GIRL: 'Course I do.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: And do you want to, too?

YOUNG GIRL: Me? Why should I? I don't know him.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Don't you feel sorry for him?

YOUNG GIRL: Folk don't feel sorry for their own kin, let alone—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Are you a married woman?

YOUNG GIRL: I'm a maid. Why?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You're young. You have a long life ahead of you.

YOUNG GIRL: God willing.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*jumps up and walks quickly back and forth, whispering to herself despairingly*): I can't... I don't know how. God help me! I simply can't.

YOUNG GIRL (*with a smile*): That's a pretty frock you've got on. And boots, too.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*going over to her*): I wanted to ask you to speak to the Old Man. Don't let him do anything so wicked.

YOUNG GIRL: He's not easy to speak to.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What will you gain by ruining another's life? Have we a right to judge others? To pass sentence on each other?

YOUNG GIRL: 'Course we have. They give me a sentence.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*in a hollow voice*): Did they? What for?

YOUNG GIRL: For the baby. I had it in a cowshed—it was so cold there the baby froze to death. They said I smothered it and give me a sentence.

(*Once more Sophia Markovna paces the floor.*)

YOUNG GIRL: Hurry and say what you want to. The Old Man don't like me to be out of his sight.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*going over to her and speaking in a hopeless, plaintive tone*): I have nothing else to say—I've said everything. I can only ask you to help, to beg the Old Man not to do us any harm. I'll give you any sum of money you want.

YOUNG GIRL (*distrustfully*): Me?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Yes, you.

YOUNG GIRL: He'll take it away from me.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Leave him.

YOUNG GIRL: Where'll I go? He'd be sure to find me. He's a stubborn one, he is. Oh, no, if you're going to give me money, we'll have to think of some other way.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You're a woman—

YOUNG GIRL: A maid.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You ought to pity people, you ought to be kind.

YOUNG GIRL: It costs us women too dear to be kind. I was kind once, and been cursing myself for it the last nine years.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: We're all unfortunate.

YOUNG GIRL (*sweeping her with a glance*): Oh, not all. Why all? (*Thinking out loud.*) 'Course if I'm in on your secret you'll pay me good. I might even... (*looks at Sophia Markovna with a meaning smile*) feed him something... you know....

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*alarmed*): Who?

YOUNG GIRL: Anybody. With money I could go far away. I could leave him. He's lived his life, the Old Man has.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Does he mistreat you?

YOUNG GIRL: Not always.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What are you to him? A relative?

YOUNG GIRL (*with a sigh*): A dog. A dog that met him in the road and trotted after him. When he needs me, he pets me; when he's sick of me he kicks me. Folk are tame when they've got to be, but they're wild animals at heart. The owner here—is he your sweety?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: He's a good man.

YOUNG GIRL: They're all good when they want something of you. But it's time for me to be going.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: And so you are willing to help me?

YOUNG GIRL: I guess I'd better.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I was sure you had a kind heart!

YOUNG GIRL: Us women have all got weak hearts. Good-bye. I'll talk to that old woman of yours.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*uneasy*): Be careful what you say to her. Her mind is touched.

YOUNG GIRL: They all get that way in old age. But she's a good woman. There's something I'd like to ask you for.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What is it? Anything you like.

YOUNG GIRL (*in the tone of a beggar asking alms*): Haven't you got some old clothes I could wear? And some boots? Especially a frock—like the one you're wearing. It's too pretty for words!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*amazed*): But... but you.... Very well, I'll find a frock for you—more than one. And some boots too.

YOUNG GIRL: I'm sure I'll be very grateful to you.

TANYA (*coming in*): What's she here for?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I'll tell you later, Tanya.

YOUNG GIRL: Is she his daughter?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Yes.

YOUNG GIRL: And the curly-headed boy his son?

TANYA: What does she want?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Wait, Tanya, I beg you to.

YOUNG GIRL: A son and a daughter! I can see it's not easy for you. Looks like you, too, have got one of those weak hearts that don't know what's good for it. (*Goes out.*)

TANYA (*in surprise*): What's that? What did she say? Did she tell your fortune?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*hastily*): Yes, she told my fortune. What's the matter with you? You seem to be upset about something.

TANYA (*puzzled*): I don't know what the matter is. I'm afraid. Zakharovna keeps muttering about some awful calamity.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*frightened*): What sort of calamity?

TANYA: I don't know. She's always teasing or frightening me. This house gives me the creeps. Pavel's in love with you.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What nonsense!

TANYA: Yes, he is. That's why he's so cross all the time. People in love are always cross. He kisses your gloves. Why don't you tweak his ears for him?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: What an absurd mix-up!

TANYA: Something very strange is going on. Today's been a horrible day. Funny—I graduated from the gymnasium and can't make head or tail out of anything, while Zakharovna is illiterate and understands everything. What's the calamity she keeps talking about?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*angrily*): She's a stupid old woman. I'll go and tell her so this very minute. (*Makes for the door.*)

TANYA: Wait! I wanted to ask you— Gone, and at a run. How very undignified! (*Goes over to the desk and begins rearranging the things on it while she hums to herself*):

> He'll dash to my door on a fine white horse
> And he'll knock at the door with his sword. . . .

PAVEL: Where's father?

TANYA: I don't know. Pavel, what makes everybody so edgy today?

PAVEL: Does that interfere with your day-dreaming? You're always day-dreaming instead of doing what you ought to.

TANYA: Is kissing ladies' gloves doing what you ought?

PAVEL: Who kisses ladies' gloves?

TANYA: You do.

PAVEL: Idiot!

TANYA: Don't dare call me names!

PAVEL: I'd like to give you a good walloping.

TANYA: Go away.

PAVEL: Go yourself—to the devil.

TANYA (*tearfully*): So I will, you horrid boy!

PAVEL: Jelly-fish! (*Left to himself, he walks angrily up and down smoking a cigarette. Suddenly he stops, listens and goes cautiously over to the window.*)

OLD MAN (*outside the window*): Don't believe them when they start purring. Anybody'll make promises when you've got them by the throat.

(*Pavel glances furtively about, gives a bewildered smile, runs his fingers through his hair, and listens again.*)

OLD MAN: I know him all right—he was like that when he was young, too.

(*Mastakov enters, sees Pavel and goes over to him. Pavel doesn't hear him.*)

MASTAKOV (*putting his hand on the boy's shoulder*): What are you doing here?

PAVEL (*starting away*): Nothing.

(*He looks at his stepfather fearfully and makes for the door. Mastakov glances out of the window, turns back swiftly and holds out his hand.*)

MASTAKOV: Pavel! Pavel!

(*Pavel goes out, slamming the door after him.*)

MASTAKOV: So he knows. Well, what of it?

CURTAIN

## ACT IV

*Rear entrance of the old house belonging to Mastakov. The moon is shining brightly. Tanya and Zakharovna are sitting on the steps, the Young Girl is standing in the doorway chewing something. On the left is a fenced garden with a gate leading into it. The lighted window of the kitchen can be seen to the left of the entrance, the windows of Mastakov's room to the right. A bench stands under these windows.*

TANYA: Go on.

ZAKHAROVNA: Eh?

TANYA: Go on with your story.

ZAKHAROVNA: I forget where I left off ... hm ... so I loved all three of them at once.

TANYA: Why three?

ZAKHAROVNA: Why not? Three-four—the number don't count. And I loved my husband too. How I did pity that man! My heart fairly burst a-pitying of him every time I went off with another! Cried my eyes out at times. I used to say to myself: here is he counting me his own true wife, and here am I off with another! And that'd make me love and pet him as never before.

TANYA: Is that the right way to behave?

ZAKHAROVNA: You'll see for yourself in time.

TANYA: Do all women act like that?

ZAKHAROVNA: All as have got any spirit in them. I was full of spirits in my young days.

TANYA: Who was your first lover?

ZAKHAROVNA: A land surveyor. Smooth all over, he was—like a mouse. I had two brothers, very strict. Soon as they heard he'd robbed me of my maidenhood they took him fishing and drowned him.

TANYA (*thoughtfully*): How simply you say that! As if it was perfectly natural.

ZAKHAROVNA: What's that?

TANYA: You say frightful things and they don't sound frightful at all.

ZAKHAROVNA: Frightful? It's love I'm talking about.

TANYA: Didn't you feel sorry for him?

ZAKHAROVNA: For who?

TANYA (*vexed*): Tck! The land surveyor, of course.

ZAKHAROVNA: Cried my eyes out. I was young and soft-hearted those days. It's our woman's lot to be soft-hearted: we was born to love the men, and that's what we do. Sometimes love's worse'n taking poison, but we take it just the same. We feel sorry for this fellow, we're afraid of that one, we can't resist the other, and so we love them all.

PAVEL (*in the doorway behind the Young Girl*): Harping on the same subject, you old crone? And you, Tanya—aren't you ashamed? Just you wait! (*Disappears.*)

ZAKHAROVNA (*mockingly*): Oh, what a fright he give me! He's always about, that boy, like an evil spirit. The same old subject indeed! What else am I to talk about? I've got no book learning—there's nothing I know but my own life.

TANYA: He says I ought to be ashamed, but he himself has a girl in town.

YOUNG GIRL: They make the shame and then blame us for it.

ZAKHAROVNA: Is that tramp of yours asleep?

YOUNG GIRL: He's lying down.

TANYA (*to the Young Girl*): Do you tell fortunes?

YOUNG GIRL: What do you mean? With cards?

TANYA: With cards, or palm reading.

YOUNG GIRL: Lord, no! That'd be a sin. I'm no gypsy.

TANYA: Well, you told Sophia Markovna's fortune, didn't you?

YOUNG GIRL: Not I. I wouldn't dream of doing no such thing!

ZAKHAROVNA (*alarmed*): They were just . . . just having a little talk.

TANYA: They were not. Sophia Markovna told me so herself. You're trying to hide something from me.

ZAKHAROVNA: From a clever girl like you? Nonsense! You know everything without us telling you.

OLD MAN (*coming out on the porch*): What might you be talking about?

ZAKHAROVNA: About rivers and lakes, about ducks and drakes, about the sky above and how to make love. . . .

OLD MAN: You're too old to make jokes, aren't you?

ZAKHAROVNA: I've been making jokes all my life.

TANYA: Who is he to tell us what we ought to do? The idea!

OLD MAN: Up to your tricks, old woman! I heard the filthy things you told the young miss.

ZAKHAROVNA: No tricks at all. What need of tricks has she? She's no gypsy, no horse thief.

TANYA: I want to know what right you have to tell us what to do!

ZAKHAROVNA: Let's hear what *you* have to say, once you're so upright.

OLD MAN: I'm not a teller of tales.

ZAKHAROVNA: Then tell us the truth.

OLD MAN: Who wants to hear the truth?

*(Goes down the steps, halts, looks up at the sky, then goes over to the garden fence.)*

TANYA: A horrid old man! Anyone would think this was his house.

ZAKHAROVNA: Hadn't you better go to bed, Tanya? It's late.

TANYA: I don't feel like it.

ZAKHAROVNA: Then ... then go in and fetch me my shawl. I'm catching a chill. That's a dear.

TANYA: Very well—foxy! *(Goes out.)*

ZAKHAROVNA *(softly to the Young Girl)*: Well, what do you say?

YOUNG GIRL: All of you make big promises....

ZAKHAROVNA: What do you mean—all of you? Not a soul but me is to know about this.

YOUNG GIRL: And the fine lady? She asked me, too.

ZAKHAROVNA *(frightened)*: Her? She couldn't have!

YOUNG GIRL: She did.

ZAKHAROVNA *(anxiously)*: Deary me!... But look, a chance like this only comes once in a lifetime. Listen to me, an old woman—

PAVEL *(coming out of the kitchen)*: Don't listen to her, listen to me.

YOUNG GIRL: It's too soon to listen to you.

PAVEL: Come into the garden with me.

YOUNG GIRL: I'm afraid of you.

PAVEL: Why of me more than others?

YOUNG GIRL: Your hair's so curly.

PAVEL: Will you come with me?

YOUNG GIRL: I suppose I might as well.

ZAKHAROVNA: Merciful heavens, looks like there's no way out, nothing I can do to stop him!

OLD MAN (*coming back and peering into the garden*): Who's she with?

ZAKHAROVNA: The master's son.

OLD MAN: Why don't you go to bed, you old sow?

ZAKHAROVNA: Why don't you? (*Gets up.*)

(*Without answering, the old man sits down on the bench under Mastakov's windows. Zakharovna glowers at him a moment, then goes into the kitchen.*)

MASTAKOV (*at the window*): Anton!

OLD MAN (*starting, but not getting up or even turning round*): Well?

MASTAKOV: What do you intend to do?

OLD MAN: I've given you a shaking-up, haven't I, Gusev? I've shaken the very lights out of you.

MASTAKOV: Does that give you so much pleasure?

OLD MAN: It took you years to build this nest of stone, and in a single day I tore it down. Who's stronger—you, the rich man, or me, the homeless tramp?

MASTAKOV: What is it you want? What is it? Merely to ruin me?

OLD MAN: Why don't you bang me over the head? You could do it easy from up there.

MASTAKOV: Remember one thing: I give a living to three thousand men here.

OLD MAN: They'll get it from somebody else when you're gone. They'll always find a master to work for.

MASTAKOV: I'm a person of importance in the community.

OLD MAN: Perhaps you are in the community, but in the eyes of God?

MASTAKOV: That's for God to judge, not you.

OLD MAN: Nor you.

MASTAKOV: What is it you want?

OLD MAN: Give me time. I'll tell you when I'm ready. Here comes that pal of yours, that drunk.

(*Kharitonov, in a dishevelled state, comes out of the garden. On catching sight of Mastakov he goes over to him.*)

KHARITONOV: I stretched out for a little rest in the summer-house and fell sound asleep. Suddenly I hear voices. Open my eyes and look at my watch. Almost twelve. In other words, I'm here for the night.

(*Mastakov goes out.*)

KHARITONOV: Very polite I must say. (*Sits down on the porch steps and yawns.*) How do you spend your time, Old Man? Wandering from place to place praising God and stealing chickens?

OLD MAN: It's not praise God wants of us, but repentance.

KHARITONOV: Repentance? Hm. And what if I have nothing to repent?

OLD MAN: I don't believe it.

KHARITONOV (*incensed*): What do you mean by talking to me like that, you old geezer? I'm civil with you, and you—

OLD MAN (*getting up and going over to the steps*): Make way.

KHARITONOV (*involuntarily moving over*): What—What's the idea?

(*The Old Man walks past, brushing Kharitonov with the skirt of his coat.*)

KHARITONOV (*shaking himself*): The son of a bitch!

(*Pavel comes out of the garden in high spirits. He is followed by the Young Girl.*)

KHARITONOV: Who's that insolent Old Man that hangs about here?

PAVEL: He's known my stepfather for a long time.

KHARITONOV: So have I.

PAVEL: He knew him as a young man.

KHARITONOV: Well, what of it?

PAVEL: They were friends.

KHARITONOV (*thoughtfully*): Friends? Hm. Did he tell you that?

PAVEL: She did.

KHARITONOV (*studying the Young Girl*): She did, did she? Why doesn't anybody go to bed?

PAVEL: Yakov's in bed.

KHARITONOV: Where?

PAVEL: In my room.

KHARITONOV (*after a pause*): I wouldn't mind having a glass of kvass, or tea.

PAVEL: The samovar's boiling in the dining-room.

KHARITONOV: At midnight? Hm.

(*He gets up and goes into the kitchen, beckoning Pavel to follow him. Pavel does so reluctantly. The Young Girl stands near the steps with a dreamy smile on her face. Zakharovna glances out of the kitchen window.*)

YOUNG GIRL: Come here.

ZAKHAROVNA: What for?

YOUNG GIRL: Sit here with me a bit.

ZAKHAROVNA: It's time to go to bed.

YOUNG GIRL: That doesn't matter. Sit here awhile. (*Pause.*) That boy....

ZAKHAROVNA (*uneasy*): What about him?

YOUNG GIRL: He's nice. Very affectionate.

ZAKHAROVNA: What did he say to you?

YOUNG GIRL: Different things.

ZAKHAROVNA: For instance?

YOUNG GIRL: What they always say to the maids. You know.

ZAKHAROVNA: Merciful heavens! Mind you don't.... (*Stops herself.*) I wouldn't talk to him much about his stepfather if I was you.

YOUNG GIRL: Why should I?

ZAKHAROVNA: That's right. That boy hasn't got much sense yet.

YOUNG GIRL (*with a sigh*): He's still young.

PAVEL (*from inside the house*): Zakharovna!

ZAKHAROVNA: Coming! Deary me—nothing but trouble, trouble, trouble....

OLD MAN (*from the window*): Marina!

YOUNG GIRL: What?

OLD MAN: You here?

YOUNG GIRL: Yes.

OLD MAN (*coming out on the porch and glancing about*): What did you talk to the boy about?

YOUNG GIRL: He asked my name, how old I was, where I come from. Listen—

OLD MAN: I'm listening.

YOUNG GIRL: Drop this business.

OLD MAN (*on his guard*): Drop it? Why should I?

YOUNG GIRL: Take as much money as you can get and drop it. If you don't, we'll find ourselves in trouble.

OLD MAN (*after a pause*): So you feel sorry for them, do you?

YOUNG GIRL: That, too. They're quiet and peace-loving and they live a good life—plenty of everything: cows, horses, lots of chickens and geese. Pigs, too.

OLD MAN (*complacently*): You little fool.

YOUNG GIRL (*after a pause*): Listen—

OLD MAN: What else?

YOUNG GIRL: You can make them do whatever you want. Make the master's son marry me. I'd live with him and you'd live with us. I'd be good to you.

OLD MAN: You little fool.

YOUNG GIRL: Is that all you can say?—fool! fool! Look out that you're not a fool yourself. They'll put a powder in your tea and that'll be the end of you.

OLD MAN (*quickly*): Are they thinking of doing that?

YOUNG GIRL: I just said that to show you. How do I know what they're thinking of doing? But it's not hard to get rid of a person, is it?

OLD MAN (*with a snort*): There's nothing else they can do to me. They've got nothing to fight me with, nothing at all. I'm holding a chain in my hand, and they're on the other end of it. One link fits into another; one crime leads to another.

YOUNG GIRL: Drop it all. Take a thousand rubles—or even ten thousand. Why not? Listen—

OLD MAN (*gloatingly*): So they want to get rid of me, do they?

YOUNG GIRL: Did I say that? I never said any such thing.

OLD MAN: You don't have to. It's all that fine lady's doings! The snake! Very slick of her. (*Sternly.*) Mind you keep on your toes! Don't miss a word they say, not even a wink.

YOUNG GIRL: They'll get us in trouble. There's a lot of them. That old woman—she knows what's up. She's a smart one, she is.

OLD MAN: Sh, somebody's coming. Come here. (*Takes her behind the house. Kharitonov and Zakharovna come out on the porch, both of them looking distressed.*)

KHARITONOV: He's not here either. Where could he be hiding, the tramp!

ZAKHAROVNA: Don't call him names. God willing, things'll settle.

KHARITONOV: Settle?

ZAKHAROVNA: Yes, that Old Man—

KHARITONOV: Him settle? Here? Who'd want that?

ZAKHAROVNA: Not settle, but go away. Everybody'd want that. He's a wicked Old Man.

KHARITONOV: Listen, old woman, what's going on here?

ZAKHAROVNA: I'm sure I don't know.

KHARITONOV: You're lying.

ZAKHAROVNA: Why should you say such a thing to me, Yakim Lukich? I'm old and foolish.

KHARITONOV: The older you get, the more lies you tell.

ZAKHAROVNA: You'd ought to have a heart-to-heart talk with Ivan Vasilyevich. You're a man.

KHARITONOV: Out with it, now!

*(From behind the house come Mastakov and Sophia Markovna. She is in travelling clothes.)*

KHARITONOV: Where are you going this time of night?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I'm going home and Ivan Vasilyevich is seeing me off.

MASTAKOV: Just to the carriage. I won't run away.

KHARITONOV (*softly*): Listen, friend—

MASTAKOV: What is it?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Come along. Good-bye, Yakim Lukich.

KHARITONOV (*standing in her path*): Just a minute, Sophia Markovna. As you know, I owe a great deal to Ivan Vasilyevich and am very grateful to him. Tell me what has happened. I can see—

MASTAKOV (*in a flat voice, with a little laugh*): This is what has happened, Yakim—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*hurriedly*): You can tell him afterwards.

MASTAKOV: After what? When I was young I—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: —had an accident.

MASTAKOV: I was arrested and sentenced to exile, and I ran away.

KHARITONOV (*aghast*): You? You must be joking! (*To Sophia Markovna.*) He is joking, isn't he?

MASTAKOV: My real name is Gusev—Mitri Gusev.

KHARITONOV: I don't believe you. It's.... It's monstrous! Unbelievable!

MASTAKOV: That Old Man knew me in those days.

KHARITONOV: So that's it! Good God! Is he asking for much?

MASTAKOV: He's not asking for anything. He wants to turn me over to the police.

KHARITONOV: No! Whew!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Yakim Lukich, I beg you not to mention this to anybody.

KHARITONOV (*overwhelmed*): Good lord, do you take me for a fool?

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: You wouldn't want to lose my friendship, would you?

KHARITONOV: Sophia Markovna—

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*meaningly*): And so I can count on you to be silent? Tomorrow I shall begin trying to get a pardon for him.

MASTAKOV: There's no sense in trying.

KHARITONOV: What a fix to be in!

MASTAKOV: Tell me honestly, Yakim: do you think it's possible to pardon me?

KHARITONOV: But I ... who am I?

MASTAKOV: Do you believe in my innocence?

KHARITONOV: If I was the one to give it ... the pardon ... but I don't know ... I don't understand. And it isn't me, that's the point. Lots of people will have their say—the newspapers, you know. If one is pardoned, all the others will set up a cry: "Pardon us too!" That's the point.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Enough of this, Yakim Lukich. (*To Mastakov.*) Come along.

MASTAKOV: I'm coming.

KHARITONOV: Don't be angry, Sophia Markovna. Unfortunately it's not up to me. I just wanted to get the

picture clear. They'll all start shouting: "Pardon us too!" That'd be a fine how-d'ye-do! Will you take me into town with you?

MASTAKOV: But you said you were going to spend the night here.

KHARITONOV: Ah, yes. Where's that Yakov of mine? Yakov!

(*Goes hurriedly into the kitchen.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Why did you tell him? Oh, why? I begged you not to.

MASTAKOV: I wanted to confirm my suspicions. Did you see how he took it? And he's supposed to be my friend. Scared to death, and I didn't even tell him I was a convict.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: He's a worthless creature. If he . . . but he can't do anything to harm you.

MASTAKOV: Because you hold his notes of hand? He can if he wants to. A former friend is a vicious enemy.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: We won't talk about it any more now. Tomorrow morning you'll come up to town and we'll write an application to the public prosecutor.

MASTAKOV: What do I care about prosecutors? It's you I'm ashamed to face.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: How can you say such a thing? Remember that I love you—yes, love you and will fight for you tooth and nail. (*Mastakov silently kisses her hand.*) My money and connections are yours. But most important of all: my heart is yours. I won't let that Old Man ruin your life. He looks upon himself as a great avenger—he, you see, has suffered! Ugh, how I hate suffering! There is no justice in it—none at all! But be calm, darling, and have faith in me. I won't let him ruin you, do you hear?

MASTAKOV: I have deceived you, the person dearer to me than anyone else in the world.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA (*impatiently*): Don't. You must have more faith in human nature.

MASTAKOV: I know it better than you do.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: People are better than you think they are.

MASTAKOV: They measure everything by their own suffering and are deaf to other people's. They nurse their grievances all their lives and try to find someone on whom they can wreak vengeance. Oh, no—I haven't a chance in the world. I say it very calmly—I haven't a chance.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Give me your hand. Here's to our luck! Darling, we're going to win!

MASTAKOV: Sophia Markovna ... let me kiss you ... for the love of God.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Of God?

(*He kisses her passionately. Kharitonov and Yakov watch them from the kitchen door. Yakov looks frightened.*)

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: I must go now. Keep a tight hold on yourself, darling. We'll see each other tomorrow. Remember what I told you about Zakharovna—don't let her out of your sight. She's very odd. Come, take me to the carriage. I know how hard it is for you, but you've got to put up a good defence. Remember that happiness awaits us. I'm certain of it; it all depends on me, I swear it does. You love me, don't you? Tell me you love me.

MASTAKOV: More than life itself.

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: The old man is worn out. He's ill, poisoned by the grudge he bears, and his illness is beyond remedy. All he can do is suffer—he's not capable of anything else. Suffering is his profession, and he has elevated it to a fine art. There are lots of people like him. They enjoy their suffering because it gives them

the right to take vengeance, to ruin other people's lives. None are as egotistical as those who have been wronged.

MASTAKOV: Do you think so? I'm not sure. Take me, for instance. I've been wronged, but am I egotistical? I don't know how to be. But let's not talk about it any more. Good-bye, my love. What happiness it has been to know you!

SOPHIA MARKOVNA: Has been? Why has been? Do you really—

(*They go out. Kharitonov and Yakov steal down the porch steps.*)

YAKOV: So now Pavel is to be master here?

KHARITONOV: Go and find a horse. We've got to get away in a hurry.

YAKOV: Maybe I'll come to terms quicker with Pavel about Tanya.

KHARITONOV (*thoughtfully*): Maybe. Try. With this disgrace in the family you ought to get a much bigger dowry. Did you ever hear of anything like it? Tck, tck, tck. Maybe even I will get something out of it. Well, what are you standing there for? Go and find a horse.

(*He walks up and down smoking and muttering to himself. Pavel comes to the kitchen window and looks out.*)

PAVEL: Yakim Lukich.

KHARITONOV (*softly*): What?

PAVEL: Have you seen the Old Man out there?

KHARITONOV: No.

PAVEL: He isn't in the house either. What could have become of him?

KHARITONOV: The devil must have made off with him. Come here a minute.

PAVEL (*coming out on the porch*): Has Sophia Markovna gone?

KHARITONOV: Listen, Pavel ... er ... a stepson, of course, has no more right to give orders to his stepfather than a son to his father, but when it comes to money matters, friendship and kinship don't count. It's like a game: who'll win? Have you noticed that there's ... er ... something wrong in your family?

PAVEL (*on his guard*): Well?

KHARITONOV: Don't you ... er ... feel something in the air?

PAVEL (*suspiciously*): What do you mean?

KHARITONOV: That old man, for instance—that pilgrim.

PAVEL: What about him?

KHARITONOV: Here's what: I've known you all your life, so to speak, and ... er ... all the rest. In other words, you mean a lot to me. I take a big interest in your future.

PAVEL (*with a little laugh*): This is the first time I ever heard it.

KHARITONOV: Is it? Well, it's never too late to begin. I'm your elder by about twenty-five years. There's a lot of things I can teach you.

PAVEL: Glad to hear it.

KHARITONOV: Don't laugh—it's too soon for that. There's something I could tell you that'd make your hair stand on end.

PAVEL: About my stepfather?

KHARITONOV: Look, we're all pickets in the same fence, so we've got to stand together, haven't we?

PAVEL: I suppose so.

KHARITONOV (*listening*): Wait. Tanya's coming. There's no need for her to know this. Come into the garden—we'll talk there.

(*Tanya and Zakharovna come out of the kitchen. Kharitonov looks back at them as he hurries away.*)

KHARITONOV: I'm late—I overslept, and I've got business in town early in the morning. (*Disappears.*)

ZAKHAROVNA: Where are you going? You ought to be in bed.

TANYA: Nobody else is. Tell me this, nanny—what's going on?

ZAKHAROVNA: Nothing that I know of.

TANYA: That's not true.

ZAKHAROVNA: It's a bright night and nobody feels like sleeping.

TANYA: That's not true.

ZAKHAROVNA: Why isn't it? You can see for yourself nobody's asleep. You aren't either.

TANYA: You think you're very clever, don't you?

(*The sound of a shot comes from the other side of the garden.*)

TANYA: Oh, what's that? Did you hear? I knew it!

ZAKHAROVNA (*vexed*): What did you know? It's just Stepanich scaring away robbers, and you—

TANYA: Robbers? Then why is Pavel in such high spirits? There's something wrong if Pavel is feeling gay, you can be sure of that.

(*The Old Man comes scuttling out from behind the house.*)

OLD MAN: Who shot that gun?

ZAKHAROVNA: The watchman.

OLD MAN: Shooting is forbidden.

ZAKHAROVNA: Not here. We're outside the town.

TANYA (*severely, but anxiously*): It's none of your business who shot the gun.

OLD MAN: You don't know what I'm here for, young lady, and it'll be a sad day for you when you find out.

ZAKHAROVNA (*hastily, placatingly*): There's some tramps spending the night in the new building. Stepanich shot in the air to warn them they're to mind their own business.

TANYA: How dare you say such a thing, you horrid old man!

STEPANICH (*running in all out of breath*): Zakharovna! Come quick! Ivan Vasilyevich has shot himself!

TANYA (*crying out*): I told you so! (*Runs into the house.*)

ZAKHAROVNA (*running after her*): Wait! Merciful heavens!

STEPANICH: Bring water, Zakharovna, and some towels!

OLD MAN (*rushing about the yard*): Marina! Where are you? Marina!

PAVEL (*running out of the garden*): Hurry, nanny! Stepanich, drive to town for the doctor!

OLD MAN (*running into the kitchen*): Marina!

KHARITONOV (*from the garden*): How did it happen?

STEPANICH: An accident. He takes my gun and looks at it. "Why don't you clean it?" he says. "It's all rusted," he says, and turns round and the gun goes off in his hands—shoots him in the mouth.

KHARITONOV: The mouth? Ugh!

STEPANICH: Blew off his head.

PAVEL: Hitch up the cart.

STEPANICH (*sinking weakly down on a step*): What's the sense? What can a doctor do?

KHARITONOV: Come along, Pavel! Where's Yakov?

PAVEL: I'm afraid. Come with us, Stepanich.

STEPANICH: Where to? What for? So that's the end of the master! What a man he was!

PAVEL: They'll give it to you for that gun!

STEPANICH: Let them. What do I care?

*(They go out. The Old Man comes running out of the kitchen with his stick and knapsack in his hand. The Young Girl, also with her knapsack, comes out after him.)*

OLD MAN (*under his breath*): The sly old fox!

YOUNG GIRL: What did I tell you?

OLD MAN (*his hands shaking*): Here, help me on with this. The heretic!

YOUNG GIRL: What'll become of us?

OLD MAN: We've got to get away. They'll beat the life out of us. We've got to get to town. They won't find us there. Hurry up. Did you take everything?

YOUNG GIRL: What's there to take? I told you they'd get us in trouble.

OLD MAN: Hold your tongue! He turned coward. Showed the white feather.

YOUNG GIRL: You'd ought to have done it different.

OLD MAN: Hold your tongue, I tell you!

*(Zakharovna and Tanya come out with towels and a pail of water.)*

ZAKHAROVNA (*shouting*): Well, you old devil, are you satisfied?

TANYA: We ought to hold the Old Man.

ZAKHAROVNA: What for? Who wants him?

*(They run out.)*

YOUNG GIRL (*tearfully*): Can't you hurry? What good did we get out of it? You'd ought to have took—

OLD MAN: Come on, Marina, come on.

YOUNG GIRL: All for nothing. You tortured him to death, that's what you did—tortured him to death.

OLD MAN: God only knows why it turned out this way. (*Crosses himself and goes into the garden.*) There's a hole in the fence we can crawl through.

YOUNG GIRL: They'll come after us.

OLD MAN: They'll not be thinking about us for a while. Hurry, Marina. So you called down the punishment of the Lord on your head, did you, you heretic? (*Shakes his stick at the house.*) The Lord's cluttered up the earth with fine folk like you, with loathsome worms like you, but He'll sweep you all into the dragon's mouth—sweep away all this maggoty muck!

YOUNG GIRL (*giving him a push*): Hurry! A fine prophet you turned out to be! Fooled me, that's what you did.

OLD MAN: Just you wait! Just you—

YOUNG GIRL: You'd better tend to your own affairs before you go about the Lord's, you old pig.

OLD MAN: Marina—

YOUNG GIRL: Fooled me. "We'll sail out of here with a big cargo!" says you. Well, where's the cargo?

OLD MAN (*fiercely*): Shut up, you hussy!

YOUNG GIRL: Who are you bawling at? I'm not afraid of you!

OLD MAN: Watch your step!

YOUNG GIRL: What's to hold me to you now? Get along, you pig! Fool that I am! Why didn't I listen to those good people? Oh, what a fool I am!

OLD MAN (*muttering to himself*): Just to think! Just to think!

CURTAIN

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